Seen; Unseen

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by pinkskyline

Summary

A collection of pieces in the same universe of Shattered; Unshattered, all from the perspective of various outsiders looking at Hannibal and Will and not quite seeing them as they really are.

Notes

I have a small problem with outsider perspective, in that I am obsessed with it. I'm not sure I do it particularly well, but I love it so much. I intended to do a 'Christmas Special' for this Universe but failed utterly. Like I didn't even start. So here's a 'Valentine's Day Special' instead. I have a couple of ideas so I think there will be several outsider perspective chapters from different people that take place at random times before, during, and maybe even after Shattered; Unshattered. You can certainly read these stories if you haven't read Shattered; Unshattered but some events might not make sense as it does deviate from canon quite a bit. They will be posted on Tuesdays starting on Valentines and ending ? Here's hoping no one ends up holding anyone else's still-beating heart in the end!

Beverly

Beverly had always thought Hannibal was a bit…weird.

Okay, not always. There was a moment there when he had first started consulting with the team when he had seemed handsome and glamorous, but then she'd gotten to know him, and she'd come to the conclusion that there was something a little…off.

It's not that he was weird. Beverly loved weird people. Weird people were *her* people. She'd spent most of college trying to convince half her friends that you could have almost as much fun at a bar as playing Dungeons and Dragons, and the other half that playing Dungeons and Dragons was almost as fun as whatever niche interest they had that was definitely weirder than Dungeons and Dragons.

When she'd been a cop she'd found herself making friends with the forensic team. It's not that the other cops weren't fun–there's a place for big dumb jocks, and she'd had a lot of fun with some of them–but they weren't her people.

The forensic team liked science and craft beer and escape rooms. They did things like ax throwing and cycling whereas the cops had gone drinking and to strip clubs. The older ones, of course, had traded family barbecues back and forth and played baseball.

Beverly had thought at the time she just got along with the forensic team more because they had younger interests, but she's figured it out now. They were just her people.

She'd known Will was one of her people right away. She'd been able to push him around in the exact same way she'd been able to push around her D&D friends in college. He wasn't pathetically grateful to have a friend, or anything, but he was happy to have someone else do the heavy lifting. The talking, the activity planning, the forgiving when he wasn't particularly nice. The socializing. She knew how to be with Will.

And evidently, so did Hannibal.

From the first case they'd worked together the two of them had had a kind of secret language. Will had glared and looked annoyed at Hannibal, and Hannibal had been indulgent and solicitous to Will.

Eventually, Will's annoyance with Hannibal had faded, then died. He'd seemed to depend on Hannibal for things you just don't depend on your psychiatrist for. And Hannibal had lapped this neediness up. Encouraged it, even. He'd taken Beverly, Jimmy, and even Brian aside at different times and asked them to call him if Will ever needed him. Even if it was the middle of the night and they were out of state.

If he hadn't come highly recommended by everyone, Beverly would have assumed he was obsessed with Will.

But they had Alana's word that he was the sanest person alive. The Baltimore high society seal of approval. The psychiatric community's admiration. And of course, Jack's vaguely fawning appreciation of every thing Hannibal said, or dish he cooked, or move he made. Jack's approval made it virtually impossible for Beverly's spidey senses to do much more than twitch.

But then she'd started to get to know him better. This had happened when Will was in a coma, and then inexplicably cut Hannibal out of his life when he woke up. Will had taken a long time to wake up and get back in shape, and someone had had to take over for him at work.

Hannibal had filled in for Will. He'd been "the new Will Graham". He'd even had Beverly, Jimmy, Jack, and Brian over for dinner.

The house was something else. The decorating was part Teutonic hunting cabin, part Italian renaissance lavishness–and bafflingly, a bit Japanese something or other here and there. And everything was a little bit Addams family. Like there were skulls? Everywhere?

If you asked Hannibal about his décor, he had a perfectly plausible and reasonable explanation for everything; it was all the juxtaposition of life and death or the marriage of opposites–but mostly it was just weird. Only Jack acting like Hannibal's house was his second home made it seem normal. Because whatever else Jack was, what he mainly was was aggressively normal.

Jack's ability to project and confirm that something was normal was something they all depended on; it was a vital part of their department. Without it, would they all be able to wait with baited breath while Will imagined himself murdering people? Would they be able to stand around talking about what serial killers masturbated to? Would they be able to argue about what a child murderer would consider a fitting legacy for his life's work? Would they be able to eat a tuna sandwich while watching an autopsy?

Okay, maybe even Jack hadn't managed to make that last one seem normal. But she'd been really hungry! Their lives were busy, okay?

But even Jack couldn't make the accusations against Will seem like something they should shrug off. First of all, there were those lingering questions about Matthew Brown being sent by Will to kill Hannibal. Then there was a witness account (anonymous, but still) of someone seeing a man who looked like him walking from the scene of the crime. Then, when they investigated, they realized the murder victim was the same guy who owned the store where Will had been hurt in a way that led to him being in a coma. And then the forensic evidence on the body all pointed to Will.

And then when they ran Will's DNA against unsolved murders in the area, there were *more* .

"But it can't really be Will, right?" Beverly asked Brian and Jimmy.

"Why not?" Brian asked. "He thinks about murder for a living. The guy's unhinged. So far, he's been useful and unhinged. But he barely comes into work now, and maybe that indicates some kind of mental degeneration."

“Or moral degeneration,” Jimmy said. “Like, I get that the guy might be a murderer and we’re supposed to be all shocked, but I think we all know he was always capable of something like this. He wanted to be on the side of the angels so he didn’t actually kill anyone, he just thought about it. Maybe something affected his moral center. Having encephalitis can change a person’s entire personality, and head injuries like the one that led to his coma can cause vast changes in values.”

“Honestly mental degeneration fits more, though,” Beverly said. “I know you two aren’t always Will’s biggest fans, but he’s so smart. We like to think about his imagination as some kind of defect, but really, it only works the way it works because he’s brilliant. If he wanted to kill someone, he’d–well it sounds bad, but if he wanted to kill someone, don’t you think it’d be more impressive than this? He left his DNA right on the body. And there’s not anything even that clever about how the body was found or displayed. Like, if this was Will, there must be something wrong with his brain, still.”

“Maybe you and I are impressed by different things, Bev,” Brian said.

“Oh cut out the moral outrage crap, she’s got a point,” Jimmy said. “Will can out-think serial killers who baffle almost everyone. He can out-think any of us. If this is him, he’s completely lost it.”

“I agree,” Jack said. The rest of them were startled; they hadn’t realized Jack was standing there. Usually he drew everyone’s attention, but they’d been so focused on their conversation. “If this is Will, he’s gone beyond our help. I’m going to go get Hannibal. We might not be able to pick him up alone.”

“Hannibal isn’t his psychiatrist, though, is he? And didn’t you and Will make the decision together that you didn’t need to worry about Will’s mental state after learning about his encephalitis?” Beverly asked.

“Even if Hannibal isn’t Will’s psychiatrist, whatever problems they were having have been resolved. They’re friends again, and Hannibal’s still a psychiatrist, even if he’s not Will’s psychiatrist. And believe me, if Will has gone off the deep end because I allowed him to do the work he does without having steady psychiatric care–despite Alana Bloom’s warnings and misgivings–I will take full responsibility for that,” Jack said, his voice quiet.

Beverly nodded. “I’ll get the evidence together for the interrogation.”

Jack sighed. “I’ll go talk to Hannibal. Considering how much Hannibal cares about Will, I think this is a conversation I should have in person.”

Beverly spent the time Jack was gone organizing the evidence into organized, neat piles. And then rearranging them into different piles.

When Hannibal and Jack arrived they spoke quietly together and arranged the interrogation room the way they thought it would be best. Beverly was a little shocked by Hannibal. He truly did care about Will a lot–much more than was normal for a friend or a psychiatrist or coworker–and he seemed to be handling everything just fine. Maybe there was some tension around his eyes, but he didn’t seem hurt. Everyone else was clearly hurt. They radiated pain

like a football team after playing a losing game. Maybe an army unit after a massacre. Alana was hurt and angry–but everyone else wore their pained defeat like a shroud.

Then, during the interrogation, Beverly found out why he wasn't hurt. He didn't believe a word of it. He had total–unyielding–faith in Will, and his faith was actually not misplaced. Will was innocent, and apparently, Hannibal and Will were in love.

For Beverly, Hannibal and Will being in love explained everything. It explained why Hannibal was so hyper-focused on Will. It explained why Will had been so adverse to remaining Hannibal's patient. It explained how they went from not speaking to not having to speak because they each knew what the other was thinking.

It was the same for Jack, only he seemed to be happier than any of them about this development. Jack was definitely a romantic at heart–everyone knew that–but the fact that he hadn't let Will go crazy and become a murderer after all probably helped.

Jimmy and Brian had made some tasteless jokes about who was the top that Beverly had studiously ignored, but they seemed more relieved that Will wasn't a nutjob than worried about him being gay. Jimmy never mentioned it, but he'd been out at work since the 90s, so it would be kind of weird if he or his best friend took issue with someone else's presumably similar sexual preference–but weirder things had happened.

Alana was the only one who seemed truly phased by the news, and Beverly was sure that Will had been wrong when he had apparently claimed she was jealous. Beverly hadn't witnessed that herself, but Jimmy had been watching through a two-way mirror and said it was a bitch-fest worthy of reality TV. Beverly had felt the lash of Will's tongue before. He could be a real jerk when he was hurt, or cornered, or sometimes when he was tired or annoyed, or like, a bit surprised.

He'd always treated Alana like she was a delicate creature. He'd been sweet to her in a way he hadn't been sweet to anyone else. Alana was uncommonly pretty and took prodigious care of Will, so he had probably been nice to her because he wanted to bang her. And now, presumably, he didn't want to anymore.

But Alana wasn't hurt the way a woman scorned would be. She was trying desperately to understand something about two men she cared about–and she understood a great deal about human nature. Beverly had her doubts about some psychiatrists, but Alana was smart and usually objective. She hadn't let her affection for Abigail Hobbs get in the way of finding out the girl had helped her father the way Will and even Hannibal apparently had.

So when Beverly found Alana angrily eating a yogurt in the break room, she tried to pick her brain a little.

"What do you make of Hannibal and Will?" Beverly asked.

Alana huffed a laugh. "Haven't you heard? I'm a jealous bitch, apparently."

Beverly sat down. "I don't believe that. What's got you so shook up about all of this?"

“Hannibal might be occasionally unconventional in his approaches to therapy, but he’s not unethical. Despite all his talk of not being Will’s psychiatrist, he was. He–looking back, I think he might have cultivated codependency with Will. Forced a formerly independent man to depend on him for balance, for sanity. Even if that was all he did, that would be so wildly unethical. But if he slept with him after that? That’s not just unethical psychiatry. That’s an abusive relationship.”

“And you think Hannibal’s capable of that? I mean, he seems pretty harmless,” Beverly said.

“Abusive men don’t always seem abusive. Maybe that’s why Will distanced himself from Hannibal–but abuse victims often feel safe in an abusive relationship. Maybe Will’s childhood was abusive and Hannibal brings back a comforting–but ultimately toxic and dangerous–dynamic.”

“Okay, but you’re just making up Will having an abusive childhood to fit your narrative. Will and his dad aren’t close but he’s never given any indication that they don’t get along or that there’s anything wrong in their relationship.”

Alana closed her eyes. “I know. I’m just trying to understand what is happening here.”

Beverly shrugged. “Other people’s relationships sometimes look weird from the outside. Maybe Will only seemed dependent on Hannibal because he was drawn to him. Falling in love with him even back then.”

“But he wasn’t. I know Hannibal never felt anything real for me, but Will and I…there was something there. And I’m not saying that because I’m jealous. Hannibal was not someone Will was attracted to until very recently.”

Beverly leaned closer. “Look, Alana, I know you think as a psychiatrist you’ve got to be able to find the truth and that if you can’t suss it out it must mean that you’re missing something. But humans aren’t logical. You can’t understand everything. Some things are just unknowable.”

Alana frowned, but then nodded and changed the subject.

The only time Beverly ever heard any reference to Alana not liking that Will and Hannibal were together was when Will said, completely off the cuff, that Alana hadn’t accepted that their relationship was safe, sane and consensual, but she’d got the message to butt out of it loud and clear. She’d never made good on her threats to tell the psychiatry board that he had a romantic relationship with a former patient, and though Alana didn’t reappear at any of Hannibal’s dinner parties, they appeared to be able to work together just fine.

And if sometimes Hannibal reactions to a murder or a trauma were just a little alien, a little psychopathic, Beverly’s mind played over all the times he’d looked at Will like he was the most beautiful, majestic creature on earth and she’d comforted herself with the fact that psychopaths can’t fall in love.

And both Hannibal and Will were wild about each other. Will tried to hide it, but Hannibal’s adoration was naked, and frankly a little disconcerting at times–but not in a way that made

Beverly anything but jealous. Not because she wanted Hannibal, but because she couldn't imagine she'd ever inspire such insane devotion from anyone.

Though to be fair, she was pretty sure she didn't want that kind of love. Will lapped it up, but Beverly would find it suffocating, probably. Hannibal didn't even pack Will a lunch most days, because he'd rather drop it by the office and get to see Will. A solid eight hours apart was just too much for him.

That's just a bit much, right?

The Trainees

Jennifer was in love with Lila Powell. It was a well known fact. She lived with her (and the other FBI trainees), worked with her, slept with her, and dreamt of a life with her.

But it was also a well-known fact that she was just a little bit in love with Will Graham.

Professor Graham, to her.

Lila mostly didn't mind. Her girlfriend was beautiful, passionate, and shared the same goals and aspirations as she did. It was mostly okay with her that Jennifer had a crush on one of their professors, but she wondered what it said about Jennifer that it was absolutely the creepiest one.

Lila didn't find any of their professors attractive. Especially not the male ones (came with the territory of being a lesbian, though not, apparently, for Jennifer). But a lot of students were fascinated with Professor Graham, and not just because of how he looked.

Lots of people were obsessed with serial killers, and Graham had the job that had inspired a lot of them to sign up to work for the FBI in the first place. He hunted serial killers. There was no clearer good guy/bad guy dynamic in the policing world. A lot of people who wanted to be FBI wanted to get away from police departments that asked them to harass people for driving while black or walking down the street in certain neighborhoods. They didn't want to be a bad person just because they were a cop. And nobody, absolutely nobody, took issue with the politics of putting serial killers behind bars, unless they were arguing they should get the death penalty instead.

So he had that whole white knight thing going for him, but he also understood the serial killers. And it was obvious to his students that it wasn't just an exercise–he had a darkness inside him. A darkness that was as obvious to serial killers themselves as it was to Freddie Lounds. And there was something seductive about it. That darkness.

Someone had even asked about Freddie Lounds during their first lecture with Graham.

"Did you really tell Freddie Lounds that it's not very smart to piss off a guy who thinks about killing people for a living?" the brave soul asked.

Professor Graham grimaced. "I did. And if you learn anything from me, learn not to say things like that to people like her. I got in trouble with my boss, coworkers, even my dad gave me shit. The only person it really did anything positive for was Freddie Lounds. She loved it. Don't feed the trolls."

Lila got the sense that this wasn't the answer most of the class had been hoping for, but her respect for Graham had grown slightly.

And then there were his lectures. They were something else. Hypnotic, entertaining, and better than an episode of Criminal Minds was the general consensus, a nd Lila had to agree. It

was annoying that he wouldn't ever let them ask questions, but most of them gave him a pass on this as he obviously had some kind of a social disorder. Besides, the diminutive Mr. Graham put himself in physical and mental danger constantly, and he got results. He got so many results, in fact, that about a third of his lectures were canceled because he was out in the field with Jack Crawford. Some of their other lecturers were called away to do real FBI work, but none was in such high demand as Graham, and that could do nothing but increase the student's respect for him.

You could practically hear the way the hearts of the students in the lecture hall collectively sank when they heard the door open during a lecture. It was usually Dr. Bloom or Jack Crawford, and that meant the lecture was over. At least Dr. Bloom usually waited until the scheduled end of the class.

But this time, the door opened and no interruption was forthcoming. Graham glanced at the door and kept talking, and a tall, elegantly dressed man leaned against the wall to listen to the rest of the lecture.

As the students filed out of the room, the well-dressed man walked over to Will and said something in soft, accented English.

"Who's the hottie?" Camilla asked Jennifer.

Jennifer leaned closer so as not to be heard. "I think that's Dr. Lecter. They work cases together sometimes."

Lila took another look at the man and realized Jennifer was right. She recognized him from a photo that accompanied one of his articles on abnormal psychology. It had been a fascinating article, and Lila had set a Google alert for his name to read more. It had ended up giving her a lot of weird high society stuff and the occasional Tattlecrime article.

So she unaccountably knew a lot more about Hannibal Lecter than she ought to, even if she'd only read the headlines of some of them.

Lila, Jennifer and Camilla went to the cafeteria and the three of them sat down.

"That Dr. Lecter's cheekbones can't be real. These high society types always have work done. Implants," Camilla said wisely.

"Why would he have cheekbone implants but not get his teeth fixed? He's definitely just genetically blessed," Lila said.

"How do you know what his teeth look like?" Jennifer asked, eyes narrowing.

Game over. She'd have to own up to her internet stalking, now. She confessed about her accidental following of Dr. Lecter's life in the society pages, and they all crowded around her phone and looked at the alert history.

"I think Graham and Lecter are an item," Camilla said.

"Oh don't say that," Lila said, "You'll break Jennifer's heart."

“Like I wouldn’t be absolutely stoked about having a gay professor, who I definitely am not crushing on. I only have eyes for you, Lila! But I don’t get what you mean about Graham and Lecter. Sure, there’s some pictures of them together, but they’re friends. Coworkers.”

Camilla raised an eyebrow. “The denial is strong in this one.”

Lila shrugged. “Can’t say I see it, either.”

“It’s all in how Lecter looks at Graham. See this one?” Camilla pointed a very damning one out. Then another. Then after a third even Jennifer conceded that maybe they were a thing.

“Professor Graham can get it,” Camilla said. “He must be smoother than he looks.”

Jennifer sighed. “No, he’s not smooth. He’s handsome, smart and sensitive, but he’s definitely not that smooth. I bet Dr. Lecter chased him.”

They didn’t see the two men together in order to confirm or deny for about two weeks, and then, they did. The same group of women were sitting at the same table when Dr. Lecter and Professor Graham walked in.

They sat at an out of the way table and Dr. Lecter brought what looked like a bento box out of his bag, and laid it out in front of Graham. Graham gave him a look that somehow eloquently stated that Dr. Lecter was his boyfriend and was being really extra, and then he started eating with gusto.

“They really are together,” Jennifer said, a little mournfully. “And they’re cute.”

“It’s not like you were going to go straight and dump me for him anyway, right?” Lila asked.

Jennifer rolled her eyes. “Please. It’s not like that. I just can’t help but admire a guy who thinks like no one else on earth and looks like an angel. Those curls. He’s adorable. Kind of like a puppy. I want to play with his hair or something. I don’t actually want to get with the guy.”

Lila laughed. “I mean, if you were in love with a female professor there’s a possibility you might actually want to have sex with her so this is probably better.”

“A crush is not in love,” Jennifer said.

Camilla sighed, still looking over at Lecter and Graham. “I want what they have.”

Lila shook her head. “I’m not sure why you’re not jealous of Jennifer and I. Our relationship is, like…”

Jennifer laughed. “Indefinable?”

Lila caught her hand. “It’s perfect.”

Jennifer smiled sweetly.

Camilla huffed angrily. “Well I wasn’t jealous of your relationship before, but I am now!”

A couple of weeks later Jack Crawford himself came into one of Lila’s lectures.

“I need a volunteer to take care of some dogs. Like I dunno, six or seven,” he said. “They’re well behaved and come with their own food. You’ll have to stay off campus where the dogs live for a few days.”

Lila loved dogs, and she missed having privacy and a yard, so she put up her hand. Jennifer agreed it sounded like a fun break from campus life and got permission to come along. They ended up taking one of the trainee cars and driving to a lonely property in a place called Wolf Trap. They played with the dogs for a couple of days, learning their names from the name tags on their collars and feeding them the homemade dog food they’d found in the freezer.

Lila’s phone rang. “Hello,” she said.

“I hear you have my dogs,” a terse voice said.

“Uh, yeah. They’re amazing! We love your dogs. But Mr. Crawford didn’t even tell us who you were.”

“Oh, sorry Lila, this is Will Graham,” the voice said.

Lila couldn’t help but laugh. “No shit,” she said. She’d actually been living in her professor’s house and she hadn’t even snooped around. It was probably a good thing Jack hadn’t told her and Jennifer who’s dogs they were looking after.

“Yeah, I had to go out of town. We caught the guy. You can get a preview of my next lecture on Tattlecrime,” Will said.

There was a short murmured conversation, and then Will sighed heavily. “Apparently I’m being rude, and if you’d like to ask me stuff you can do that when we get there.”

“That would be amazing Mr. Graham! Thank you. We’re here now. And if you ever need someone to take care of the dogs again, we’re definitely available. We’re big fans of these sweeties. Especially Winston.”

“Okay, see you soon,” Graham said, and they hung up.

“Jennifer, get dressed now! We’re being evicted,” Lila said.

Jennifer, who’d been up all night doing a surveillance assignment for a class, dragged her ass out of bed on faith alone that Lila wouldn’t mess with her if it didn’t matter, and as she got dressed Lila told her about the conversation she’d just had.

“Wait, this is Will Graham’s house? These are Will Graham’s dogs we’ve been petting?” Jennifer concluded.

“Yes! And he’s going to be here any minute. And he said he’d answer questions about his latest case,” Lila said.

“Holy crap,” Jennifer said.

Lila just had time to put coffee on and arranged some Danishes she’d gotten from a bakery in Baltimore the previous day on a plate before she heard a car on the drive. Jennifer’s steps thumped down the stairs inelegantly, but you couldn’t hear them much over the barking of Will Graham’s (!) seven dogs.

Lila opened the door. “Hi Professor Graham. Dr. Lecter,” she said. They both mostly ignored her in favor of cooing at and petting the dogs, who seemed just as excited to see Lecter as their master. Lila had never really seen Graham smile before. He had a wonderful smile. But like, it would be weird if he smiled all the time while he lectured about murder and cannibalism so only seeing it when he was with his dogs made a lot more sense. And Dr. Lecter, who seemed so posh and proper, got right down on his knees to let the dogs lick his face, just like Graham.

Graham stood up. “Hi Lila. Thanks so much for this. I hope Jack actually gave you the option to say no. He sometimes forgets about other people having freewill. Especially trainees.”

“We’re willing volunteers, honest. Well, Lila volunteered. I was happy to get some time to play with the dogs and have an excuse to go walking a lot,” Jennifer said.

“Well, I know it’s not exactly normal for a lecturer to ask his class members to look after his dogs, especially in his house, but I guess Jack didn’t even tell you that you were looking after them for me.”

“Do you still have time to tell us what took you away from your dogs?” Lila asked.

Graham gave a pained grimace, which reluctantly became a smile. “Sure.”

They came in and got comfortable while Lila and Jennifer put their belongings in the trainee car and made sure they hadn’t left anything behind, and then they all crowded around the kitchen with coffees. Will Graham even took a Danish from the plate.

“So, you said on the phone you caught the guy?” Lila prompted.

“Yes. Elroy James Latimer. He was a trucker, and he’d killed fourteen truckstop girls on the I-95,” Graham said.

“Killers who hunt in a big area like that are really hard to find, aren’t they? Can you tell us how you did it, or would that ruin the lecture?” Lila asked.

“Will saw a pattern in the randomness of the attacks. He was able to anticipate the next victim, and we did a sting. Most importantly, we were able to save the girl,” Dr. Lecter said. He looked over at Graham like he was the most amazing creature on earth.

“And what’s your job on a hunt like that? Are you there to help interrogate the suspect?” Jennifer asked.

“When I first joined the team I was mostly there to help Will come back from dark places and throw ideas back and forth with him about the killer. When he took time off for illness, I took

over the job. But we're both much better at the job when we're together than when we're apart, so if our schedules allow, we both go. I don't have Will's gift of empathy but I do have psychiatric training."

"Took time off for illness? That's an interesting way of saying I was in a coma, Hannibal," Will scoffed.

Lila looked over at Jennifer and subtly raised an eyebrow. These two were something else.

They asked a few more things about the case, and then put Graham out of his misery by making noises about going back home.

They must have done something right, either in the conversation, or in looking after the dogs (or maybe they were just the only trainees Graham knew by name), because a couple weeks after that they were asked to join a manhunt.

They weren't the only trainees asked; there were five of them in total. The trainees and Jack's team (including Hannibal Lecter) were gathered in a conference room to hear about the killer they would be hunting.

"The killer is a white male between 35 and 45. He's targeting women in their early twenties who have profiles on Tinder. Trainees, your job will be to analyze Tinder profiles from 3 states to find men who might fit the perpetrator's profile, or women who might fit the victim's profile. Will, could you walk us through those profiles?" Jack said.

"The women are young, still in school, and all claimed to be Christian or had a Bible quote on their profile. They're all attractive but express something about being shy or awkward or new to the dating scene, but nevertheless interacted with a lot of different men. The victims didn't ever interact with the same man, so we have to assume the killer is operating a series of fake accounts. If we could pinpoint the fake account we think is the killer for all the women, we might be able to analyze the text and learn something about the killer, so some of the team should be working on that. The man could be looking for a prospective mate and killing anyone who fails to meet his standards, but I think it's more likely these young women are similar to another woman who he knew, who rejected him–possibly years ago. He might have killed this woman or he might never have spoken to her and she's still around today. I'm not sure looking for the original college girl is particularly helpful, but if we get more information and are able to ask the public for help, it might just be the way we find this guy."

"What about making a fake profile? We could even do a composite of the victims profile pictures and take parts from all of the written parts. If we talk to him, we can figure out things about him or get his IP address or maybe even convince him to meet us," Jennifer said.

Will nodded. "Okay. Someone who has had a Tinder account before and knows how all of that works set it up. I'll be the victim, so no swiping on anyone or responding to any messages. That will be me."

Lila laughed. "Why you? No matter what your personality, I'm closer in temperament, age, gender and experience to any of the victims than you are. Why would you be the better

choice? Like experience undercover or something?"

Hannibal came over and sat down. "Will can read the text conversations of the victims and assume their point of view. Even their personality. He sometimes accidentally mimics the speech patterns of people whose point of view he assumes. He doesn't always take the perspective of the killers, although taking the perspective of the victims can be harder on him."

"Only if I'm imagining them actually being murdered. Having a conversation on Tinder can't be that damaging to my psyche, can it?" Will asked, sitting down beside Hannibal.

"Spoken like someone who's all coupled up, Will. Believe me, I've suffered a lot of psychic damage from my time on Tinder," Beverly said.

"I really don't think that's the same thing," Will said.

"Here is the printout of the text exchanges. Have fun becoming a virginal college girl," Beverly said, walking away with a wry smile.

Lila and Jennifer exchanged glances. This shit was just so weird. But literally everyone else in the room thought a male former cop in his late thirties would be better at being a college girl than two women who'd been college girls five years ago.

"Is this real life?" Jennifer whispered.

Lila nodded back slowly.

With the help of someone from IT, they managed to put a profile together. When they showed it to Will Graham, he crossed his arms over his chest.

"I don't know. It seems a bit forward," he said, his voice hesitant.

Hannibal put a hand on his shoulder. "That's the point isn't it? To make contact?"

"But not. Not like that," Will said, gesturing to the screen. He went to work on the profile and changed a couple of things.

That night Camilla came over for dinner, and they told her about the eerie transformation.

"It was like he was a little girl. It's not like his voice went high or anything, but he was just instantly shy, and sort of hesitant? Like I felt the desire to protect him, all of a sudden," Jennifer said, picking up a piece of pizza and putting it on her plate.

"Let's face it though, you always wanted to protect him," Camilla said.

"No, but his changes were better. He really just read a bunch of text messages and then was able to mimic the personalities of multiple senders. Like CIA analysts have to train for this and it's just his weird-ass brain," Lila said.

"And Dr. Lecter suddenly got like, really supportive and fatherly," Jennifer said.

“And Graham was like, all vulnerable and held his hand? It was so wild. Honestly. This guy is another species. Or a superhero or something,” Lila said.

“I seem to remember you not being much of a groupie before–this text message trick was enough to change all that for you?” Camilla asked.

“It’s not a trick. It’s messed up! But so amazing. Like literally Will Graham should be studied by science,” Lila said.

“And Hannibal Lecter loves him whoever he becomes,” Jennifer said.

Freddie

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

If Freddie Lounds were to describe her relationship with Will Graham in the florid prose she used in Tattlecrime, she'd say she was a shark, and he was the chum in the waters. She would consider it a flattering comparison for herself, and fitting for Will, because Will Graham seemed pretty comfortable with blood and gore.

It would also explain why she was following Will Graham in a way that would make sense to other people the same way it made sense to her. She wasn't obsessed with him or anything. She didn't even like him. But if he went somewhere, a story usually followed. Gave a whole new meaning to the expression "if it bleeds it leads". Actually it was more like, where Will Graham led, blood would surely follow.

She only really intended to follow him during his working hours, but after that weird little meeting with him and Dr. Hannibal Lecter, she'd started to wonder what she was missing after he went home from work. Freddie had met a lot of serial killers. Enough to know that you don't ignore bad vibes. Bad vibes were instincts acting up, and listening to her instincts was what kept her alive.

So she followed Will Graham all day and some nights, when she wasn't chasing other stories. But other than a lot of boring artsy things, she didn't find a lot. She was starting to think that maybe Will Graham really was as boring as he claimed to be, when he and Lecter ran off to Europe together.

Because now that they were away, she could snoop.

There were so many places to snoop, in fact, that she didn't know where to start.

She couldn't go to Graham's house, because his dad was living there. Graham hadn't spent a lot of time there lately anyway. But there was still Lecter's office, his old house, and his new house he shared with Will. The old house was unlikely to yield much of interest, because it was up for sale. On the other hand, she could pretend to be a prospective buyer and get in without even having to lie or risk a trespassing charge.

"It somehow looks even bigger on the inside," she told Cheryl, the obliging estate agent.

"Dr. Lecter is his own decorator and tends to make rooms look expansive rather than cozy. But you could make changes. His aesthetic is definitely not for everyone."

"What about the basement? Attic? I have a lot of furniture to store." Her cover story was that she owned an antique shop and wanted a place to store furniture and also create a kind of showcase to entertain wealthy clients.

“I can show you the attic. The basement is a little trickier. There’s no door in the house–we’ll have to go through the cellar door in the garden. Did you ever hear that thing about the words cellar door being the most beautiful in the English language? Sounds perfectly boring to me,” Cheryl said.

They went into the attic, and then they went into the basement, and Freddie nosed around hard. She thought she saw a trapdoor leading up to the upstairs–suspicious, right? But the estate agent laughed and said that Lecter or a previous owner had probably had a laundry chute. There was also evidence there had been stairs at one time, but Lecter had removed them, claiming the house was big enough without making use of the basement for anything but long term storage and shelter during a hurricane.

Now, Lecter was eccentric, to be sure, but no one closed off their own basement. That was weird as hell.

But it didn’t prove anything, beyond the fact that the man had more money than sense.

Next, she went to Lecter and Graham’s new house. It was even bigger than the one she’d just toured, which made sense, because there was a bigger yard and hardly any neighbors to complain about their ostentatiousness.

They’d built it themselves, probably spending a mint to get it done quickly, and then left shortly afterward on their extended vacation. If there were any closed off parts of the build, they’d planned them themselves.

Now, if she could just get in–

“You’re Freddie Lounds, right?”

She’d been peeking round a corner and hadn’t noticed a blond man in his thirties walk up. “Who are you?”

“The guy who’ll call the cops on you if you don’t have any business here.”

He was some kind of house sitter, then.

“But I do have business here. I’ve worked with Will and Hannibal before. I helped them when a serial killer was targeting Will. They gave me an interview and everything. I’m writing about them again, and I thought it would be a nice angle to take some pictures of their house. Just the inside. I wouldn’t give away their address to readers.”

“Will would never be okay with that, especially if he’s not here to supervise you. You can leave,” he said.

He had a certain familiar vibe that made her a little nervous, so she took the hint and left.

That night she had a call from Abigail. She had a sincere concern–even affection–for the girl, but Abigail had been giving her the run-around lately.

“I will help you with the book. I promised I would. But I don’t want my name attached to it,” Abigail said.

“But sweetie, you have no idea how much your name on the cover would drive sales. I’m a name in the biz, for sure, but you’re someone who went through it. It would be doing us both a disservice to spend all that time writing and then not profit off of the most lucrative thing either one of us has,” Freddie said.

“Jack’s been letting sleeping dogs lie. I mean, I'm sure if I was still in his orbit he'd be interviewing me and throwing suspicions around. But as it is I’m not on any wanted lists. He’s never accused me of any crime. That would change if he saw my face on talk shows talking about my traumatic past,” Abigail said.

“You didn’t do anything wrong, Abby.”

“Tell Jack Crawford that.”

Jack fucking Crawford. Always such a pain in the ass. She managed to keep Abigail on the hook a little longer, but she could hear Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham’s influence in her words, even though officially they had no idea where she’d run off to.

That only made her want to find out what creepy-ass stuff they were into even more.

The only other place that Hannibal or Will owned (at least according to public record) was Hannibal’s office, which he’d completely closed down when he left. Seemed pretty irresponsible to her–what would all the mental defectives do when he wasn’t around to hold their hand?

She managed to break in by way of a back door in the alley. So much more convenient than trying to pick a lock on a street-facing door.

Freddie looked. She read journals. She opened boxes in the storage area.

She found nothing incriminating.

But she did find one interesting thing. A picture of Will looking down at his feet in a way that Hannibal probably found charming (but to her just seemed manipulative and fake) in front of a glass-fronted house she didn’t recognize.

Now, this could totally be nothing. They might have gone off to an airbnb together and Hannibal took a picture to remember the trip. But it could be another property.

From the research Freddie had done on Hannibal the second she realized that he was a) kind of a scary guy, and b) way too obsessed with Will Graham, the murder prodigy, to be entirely normal, she’d realized that he was really rich. And pretty good at hiding the scope of his wealth and the property he owned.

If it was a property Hannibal owned, he would have gone back to it multiple times. The GPS on his car would definitely have the trip stored.

But she wasn't sure where he'd stored his car. She doubted he would have kept a Bentley at Park and Fly.

She spent a good deal of time calling around to storage facilities before she finally found one that seemed like the right one. She strolled into the office looking like a million bucks.

"Hi," she said, smiling her most charming smile at the guy behind the counter. "I have a huge favor to ask you."

"Bathrooms are for employees only," he said, not looking up from his magazine.

"I don't need a bathroom. My uncle, Hannibal Lecter, stored his car here. I really need to get in the car."

"Nope," he said.

"But I left all the research for my thesis in the trunk. I really need it," she said, her voice plaintive.

The guy raised an eyebrow. "Aren't you a little old to be a student?"

"You're never too old to learn," Freddie said inanely. She took a deep breath. "Look, I'll only be a minute. You don't even have to tell him you let me in. I won't tell him either."

"We've got policies, okay? Just take a walk, lady."

"How much would it take for you to look the other way, just this once?"

They settled on a hundred and fifty, which was actually pretty high for her to spend on a bribe. It was surprisingly easy and cheap to get people to betray their scruples. But if there really was information on the GPS which could lead to a secret property–well, if nothing else, maybe she could embarrass Hannibal by exposing his dirty property dealings. They had to be dirty if he was hiding them, right?

She got a good look at the contents of the inside of the car, and, not surprisingly, there was nothing suspicious inside.

When she played with the GPS, she managed to find at least one property that the car had gone to many times. Okay, it had gone twice. But it had to be the property–or at least, an interesting property.

She set out early in the morning because it was a bit of a drive north. When she goes to do a dangerous investigation, she usually sets up a timer which will publish the address she's visiting on Tattlecrime unless she disables it within a certain amount of time. Just a little bit of insurance she needs because she works alone. She was pretty sure that Hannibal and Will were still in Europe–she paid someone off to get their itinerary, and knows they're coming back next week–but you can never be too careful. Tickets can be changed, and the creepy couple probably wouldn't like to be interrupted if they were doing something sketchy in their little hideaway.

She'd looked at the address on Google Earth before making the trip. It looked not that different from Will Graham's old house in Wolf Trap. There was a house, an outbuilding, and a barn. She couldn't tell if it was the same house from the photograph, but there was nothing inherently suspicious about the photograph itself–and she was excited about this new clue anyway. Not a great property to sneak up on, but then she didn't think anyone was home.

Nevertheless, she parked on the highway and walked up the drive. If she was wrong and it wasn't an empty Lecter property, she would be able to just claim that her car had broken down. She didn't have a signal on her cell, so she wouldn't even have to lie about needing to use a phone.

She knew as soon as the house was in view that it probably wasn't a Lecter property. Old, broken down cars and appliances littered the yard. Will might like to work on old engines but he wouldn't leave them lying around in the open like this–not since he'd hooked up with Hannibal. Must have been an old image on Google Earth, because it hadn't looked so rundown.

None of the cars seemed to be the homeowner's working daily driver, so he mustn't be home. She couldn't hear anything but the buzz of insects. She should either go up to the house and knock on the door to confirm she was alone, or walk right back to her car and go, but she chose a third option.

The barn door had been left rather enticingly open, so she walked closer. She peeked through the door and saw that the man who lived there really liked taking things apart–even people.

The smell was atrocious. The buzz of insects was louder here than it had been in the yard, and she could see flies and maggots crawling over the body parts.

Freddie unlocked her phone.

Not to call anyone, obviously. She had no bars, and the police wouldn't let her post the story until after they'd already done some press release taking credit for everything. She started taking pictures, knowing these same shots would be used in books and even text books for years to come.

The barn had workbenches all around the walls. Tools and broken down equipment appeared sporadically on the surfaces or the floor, and there were various pegboards with what looked like antique tools hanging haphazardly over top of the workbenches. All in all, it would seem like a very normal, if very large, working space if it wasn't for the body parts sitting on the workbenches.

She saw an arm–it was pretty hairy, likely male–on one. There was a slim leg that didn't look hairy, likely female, on another. Then there was a bucket with what looked like intestines in it. A vise with a human head in it. If it wasn't for the smell, she'd assume that it was the workshop of some special effects guy trying to get the whole "serial killer aesthetic" right, but she knew what rotten meat smells like.

One of the reasons she was a vegan is that her father had been a hunter. He'd been too sexist to ever take her with him (thank god), but he and his buddies had amassed a ton of brown-

paper-wrapped bundles of meat that they had to use up. But her dad had liked killing wild game more than he'd liked eating it, and by the time the next hunting season had rolled around, she'd had the job of going through the freezer and taking out all the old meat.

Her father hadn't been the most organized person, especially around hunting season (all that drinking), and more often than not, he'd let the meat defrost in the garage and then it would just sit out there in the heated space, rotting. Her mother would nag him to take the meat to the dump (the dump was just for men, too), but he would never get around to it until the smell of rot had permeated both the garage and the ventilation system of the house.

The smell of the barn brought all that back, and there was a gag just sitting in the back of her throat as she looked around. The only saving grace was that the door was open so the smell wasn't as strong as it could have been.

She was really focused on the pictures, so she didn't hear anyone coming up behind her. But she did hear the whiz of the crowbar flying through the air towards her skull.

When she woke up, she wasn't in the barn anymore, but rather in what looked like the kitchen of the house. It was a fairly normal kitchen with all the expected appliances, yellow vinyl flooring, and a round table in front of a window with lace curtains.

She was handcuffed to a radiator. Her phone was gone, and they'd taken her purse, which contained both a stun gun and pepper spray. Her gun was in the car.

She could hear something sizzling on the stovetop, and the smell of meat cooking wafted through the air, but she didn't see anyone, or hear footsteps.

Her head throbbed, and everything was too bright and blurry. She definitely had a concussion, but, as usual in a crisis, something had happened to clear her head and crystalize her thoughts. Her heart pounded, and the adrenaline that flooded her system made her need to do something, even though waiting quietly or even pretending to still be unconscious was probably the smartest move.

Or was it? What if she managed to talk to the guy? Her readers would want to know his personal thoughts–his feelings. The reason he thought it was a good idea to leave a bunch of body parts lying around. It's not like the police would let her talk to this guy if they got him.

It was either a personal failing or her greatest strength that she walked into any and every situation convinced she would walk out of it just fine.

"Hello? Is anyone there?" she called out.

The sounds of a man heaving himself out of a chair, then footsteps approaching, with one foot dragging. Freddie's heartbeat sped even further, making her head hurt even more.

"You're awake." The man who spoke stood in the doorway of the kitchen. His hands and clothes were covered in grease, but he looked just like anyone. Average face, wiry body, jeans and a black t-shirt.

“Hi, I’m so sorry to be in your hair. My car stopped on the highway–no idea why! And I just wondered if I could use your phone,” she babbled.

“Is that why you were taking pictures of the contents of my barn, Freddie?”

“Oh! Did you find out my name from my wallet?”

“I know who you are. You’re Freddie Lounds, founder, editor and chief reporter of the crime website Tattlecrime. Believe me, if you were anyone else, you’d be dead already.”

“Why is that? Are you a fan?” she asked, grinning shakily.

“No, I’m not. You could report on some of the great achievements of our time with a little more respect. But if someone with your intellectual deficiencies could manage to find me, maybe the authorities aren’t far behind. So tell me Freddie Lounds, girl reporter, exactly how did you find me?”

Freddie’s mind raced. If she told him she found his address on Dr. Lecter’s GPS, she could maybe find out how he knew Dr. Lecter. But if she told him how she found him, he could kill her. He was only keeping her alive to find that information out, so she had to keep him from finding out about it as long as possible.

“Even an intrepid reporter such as myself can be in the wrong place at the wrong time,” she said.

The man rolled his eyes. “Oh come on. Don’t pretend like you have to protect your journalistic integrity or your source or whatever. I know you don’t follow the same ethics as other reporters.”

Freddie was still scared. Of course she was. But she was starting to get annoyed, too. “No one tipped me off. This was all me.”

“Oh yeah? What clue tipped you off?” he asked.

Freddie pulled at the handcuffs until they cut into her wrists. “The same goddamned clue that the cops are going to follow to get to you. You were really damned obvious. You’d better leave. Go on the run. Take a lot of money out of the ATM all at once, though, and then don’t use your cards again. They can track you through that.”

“Come on, Freddie, cough it up. If you don’t, I’ll go out to the barn and see what tools call out to me. Sometimes they actually speak words, you know? They say I’m hungry for an arm.”

“Really?”

“No, not really. I just thought that might be one of those clever little details your readers love. You really do have nice skin, though. It would be a shame to open it up. Maybe I’ll just see what I can do without tools.”

The man walked over slowly and started kicking Freddie. Gently at first, and then more viciously. He kept his kicks mainly to her body and legs, but he got some kicks into her arms, and managed one painful kick to the eye.

“Please, please stop!” Freddie cried out after the painful kick to the eye. She still had ringing in her ears, pain and light sensitivity from the concussion. If she got hit too many times in the head now she could die. “I’ll tell you what I know.”

The man stood above her panting. “Well?”

It was at that point Freddie heard a car door shut. She tried not to react, but the man heard it, too. He strode over to the window and looked out. He looked back at her. “Did you tell anyone you were coming here?”

Freddie almost laughed when she remembered. She’d published his address to Tattlecrime.com on a timer. Since she hadn’t disabled the timer, an appeal to her readers to call the police and investigate plus the address had been published to the home page. She’d done it a dozen times, but it had never worked as well as this before. “Is it the police?”

“Who did you tell? What can I tell the police to get them to lay off?”

“I suggest you take a look at Tattlecrime.com,” she said.

He picked up an iPad and ignored the knocking on the door as he did just that. “You fucking bitch,” he said.

“You should give yourself up quietly. The police seem to treat people like you pretty well so long as you’re polite. You’ll be famous. I’d be happy to work with you in the future–get your side of the story out there.”

“Fuck you, Freddie,” he said.

Later, she got the whole story from the arresting officer. They’d been called to do a wellness check by dozens of readers, and two officers had gone to the property. One went to the door of the house, and the other went into the barn. The one who went into the barn came out like a minute later, puking and gagging, and told the officer at the door that the guy who lived there must be a serial killer, so the officer at the door burst in as the homeowner opened the door, knocking him to the ground and handcuffing him.

“I’m in here,” Freddie called.

She remained conscious just long enough to see the cop’s face before the pain, adrenaline and repeated blows to the head caught up with her, and she passed out.

When she woke up, she was in the hospital.

Two of her first visitors were Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter.

“You’re back early,” she said.

“No, you’ve just been in the hospital longer than you’re probably aware of. They put you in an induced coma similar to what happened to me when I had my head trauma. Tell me, did you see anything cool when you were unconscious?” Will Graham asked with a strange intensity.

“No, did you?”

“Of course not,” he said in his twitchy way.

“What are you doing here?” she asked. She was actually kind of scared to have the two of them alone with her in the hospital room in her vulnerable state. Normally she would say a hospital is a pretty public place and she was fairly safe even with psychos, but Lecter was a doctor. He could probably kill her and hide how he did it fairly easily, even in a hospital.

“We’re here to interview you on behalf of the FBI about how you found a serial killer, Freddie. Did he contact you? Or did you find some kind of clues to connect you to the series of murders in Pittsburgh?” Will asked.

“Are you two really the best people to interview me? I mean, you’re not really an agent, and Hannibal’s not even an official employee,” she said.

“But Hannibal’s a psychiatrist, so he’ll be able to be really sensitive about what he asks you. And I’m an authority on serial killers, in case you’d forgotten,” Will said.

“Oh yeah, you two are definitely the picture of sensitivity,” she scoffed.

At that moment Jack Crawford walked in the door. She felt instantly better about the interview now he was there.

“How did you find Mr. Worthington?” Hannibal asked.

“Is that his name?”

“Benjamin Allen Worthington. It’s a bit of a mouthful, isn’t it? How did you find him, Freddie? He said that you claimed it was a coincidence, but no one believes that,” Hannibal said.

She’d broken the law to get Worthington’s address, but she could make things pretty uncomfortable for Hannibal if she said he’d had a serial killer’s GPS on his car.

“I took the GPS information from your Bentley when it was in storage. You’d visited Worthington before. Twice,” she said, looking at Jack significantly.

Jack looked over at Hannibal. “Is this true?”

“I have no idea if she illegally looked at my GPS, but I had visited Mr. Worthington before. He was a client. I had no idea, of course, that his emotional disturbance had reached such a level of destruction. There were no body parts in the house when I visited.”

“A client, huh? It’s pretty weird how many of your clients end up serial killers or going on killing sprees. Might indicate that you’re kind of a shitty psychiatrist, don’t you think?” Freddie asked. "I mean, unless it means something even more sinister than that."

Hannibal smiled slightly. “Not necessarily. Of course I have more clients who cause harm. My specialty is seeing clients with deep emotional disturbances and abnormal psychology. It’s not particularly suspicious that more of my clients do bad things than say, those doctors who deal exclusively with marriage counseling.”

“You’re not buying that, are you Jack?” she asked.

Jack remained silent.

“Here’s what I think happened,” Will said. “You broke into Hannibal’s office–we know you did, because there’s a security camera that activates when the motion sensor goes off–and you illegally looked in patient files until you found someone who you thought might be fun to harass, and then you bit off more than you could chew.”

“Well, here’s what I think happened,” Freddie said. “I followed the GPS like I said before, but it was put there on purpose. Hannibal knew the guy was dangerous, and left the address for me to find specifically to put me in danger. The two of you tried to kill me.”

Will’s eyes narrowed. “So you expect people to believe that Hannibal or I saw you following us and suspected you might snoop around while we were gone, so we left the address on the GPS on the off chance you managed to break into a secure facility and steal the information off the GPS?”

“You were a cop. It makes sense you’d be able to notice a tail. I’m not saying it was the only trap you laid for me, or that it was laid specifically for me or just maybe for anyone who might snoop around your life,” Freddie said.

“That’s ludicrous,” Will said. “We’d have to be pretty diabolical to do something like that, wouldn’t we, Hannibal?”

“Will, Ms. Lounds has been through a lot. Perhaps we should let her rest,” Hannibal said.

“I know the two of you did this to me on purpose,” she said.

“Ms. Lounds, you sound paranoid. It’s probably something to do with the trauma of your experience. I know you’re tough, but traumatic experiences tend to add up, and this is not the first time you’ve tangled with a serial killer. The hospital social worker will be able to connect you with someone to talk to about your experiences, or I can give you a list of associates to choose from,” Hannibal said.

“Get out, all of you! No wait, Jack, stay here, please,” she said.

Hannibal left the room without changing expression, but of course Will had a parting shot. “If we were really the reason you found Worthington, shouldn’t you be thanking us? There might be a book in it for you.”

Freddie resisted the urge to throw a pillow at him, and he finally left.

“What do you want, Ms. Lounds?” Jack said once they’d gone.

“You have to believe me. They set me up to go there on purpose,” she said.

“Both Hannibal and Will have dangerous jobs where they encounter bad people every day. If you’re going to follow them around and snoop in their business, you’re bound to run into some bad people. I’m just glad you managed to come out of this alright. Next time you might not be so lucky.”

“A reporter can hardly afford to mind her own business,” Freddie said.

“Well, maybe next time you just stay out of Will and Hannibal’s business,” Jack said, “For your own safety.”

Chapter End Notes

> Oh Freddie, I was so tempted to kill you! I almost had her find Will and Hannibal doing something shady and then we see her murder from her perspective, but she's just such a useful character I couldn't do it. But there will be consequences to this chapter in the next one.

Georgia

Chapter Notes

I think I promised a chapter from Jack's perspective, but that one is kind of involved and I have put it off for a bit (and I have been writing a fun little Victorian AU in this fandom as well). So here is a little stop-gap chapter before I get to the Jack one.

The restaurant in this story is a real restaurant in Toronto which I actually saw Scott Thompson at one time. I didn't go up to talk to him because I met him as a kid at a Kids in the Hall taping and so I was like, oh, let's just let him eat dinner. But he was with this huge group of people, and this was while he was in Hannibal, and this restaurant is right by ROM, which they filmed in like 4 different times. And I have been half convinced for years that if I had actually fangirled a bit more effectively maybe he was there with the cast of Hannibal and I would have met them all??? I didn't even look at who he was with. I am a terrible fangirl.

Anyway, enjoy!

Georgia leans against the cold wall, tension creeping into her body like she's turning to stone with it. "Are you sure about this?"

"I'm sure," Abigail says. "Hannibal and Will are fine. Trustworthy. Will got you out before the FBI even knew you killed anyone, remember? He bought me a whole car. Hannibal is personally funding our education."

"But I failed like 3 classes. My meds stopped working and I regressed so much before my psychiatrist got me back on track. I'm going to be a disappointment to them."

Abigail rolls her eyes. "You're doing so good. Remember what you were like before? You were a literal ghoul hiding under people's beds to murder them. Now you're totally hot and mostly functional. You think they're going to be mad you failed a couple of classes? Come on! Be real."

Georgia sighs. "Are you sure they wouldn't like me better if I did kill someone? Kind of seems like you're all in a murder club."

"Look, if me and Hannibal and Will have a murder club, you're definitely a member, too. I might be a founding member, but you're important to them even if you are mostly normal now. I asked if they wanted me to bring you to dinner, and they both said yes," Abigail says.

"Hannibal too?"

"Hannibal, too," Abigail says.

Georgia pushes off from the cold wall and starts walking, with Abigail doing a little dance of celebration that she's finally moving. The restaurant they're going to is one of the best in the city, in their opinion (Beyonce and Jay Z even went there when they were in Toronto), and they don't take reservations. You just have to show up and hope there's a table for you.

They'd found it one day walking around North York at night to see the Christmas decorations, and the strong smell of garlic that blew out the door every time someone went in or out persuaded them to come back when they were hungry and try the food. It was incredible.

Hannibal had offered to cook for them when he and Will visited, but Abigail wanted to host, and she was too nervous to actually cook for an amazing chef like Hannibal, so she'd decided to take them both out to dinner.

They would meet at the restaurant, but because of the whole reservations thing, which Abigail's kind of nervous about (they'd both tried to picture Hannibal Lecter waiting for a table outside in the cold and had given up in despair), they'd give the men one time, and were planning on being at the restaurant a full twenty minutes earlier.

If they could get a table right away they'd order wine and appetizers. Georgia could use a glass of wine right about now, and despite Abigail's words of reassurance, Georgia knows she's nervous, too. Knows part of the reason she doesn't want Will and Hannibal in their apartment is because she doesn't want to be alone with them. Wants the safety of being in public.

The hostess of the restaurant lets them in right away, and they walk up the stairs to an intimate table for four. They order an okay bottle of wine and an appetizer of bread and melted asiago, and sit waiting for the rest of their party.

Georgia and Abigail are sitting facing each other. "Do you think we should sit side by side?" Georgia asks.

Abigail's expression looks momentarily agonized, and then she straightens her shoulders and takes a swig of wine. "We're fine."

When Will and Hannibal arrive, Georgia has to do a double take. Will looks so incredibly healthy. He's smiling and his handshake is strong–he even hugs Abigail with a minimum of awkwardness and insecurity. Hannibal is, of course, as buttoned up and stiff as ever, while simultaneously being the smoothest motherfucker in the room. Will looks like an angel and Hannibal a handsome devil–or the demon that will tempt you into selling your soul.

Will sits down and looks at the wine bottle in front of Abigail. "You're not old enough to drink yet, are you?"

Abigail smirks. "I am in Canada. The drinking age in this province is only 19. Fleeing the country has certain tangential advantages," she says, pouring him a glass of wine.

He takes a drink. "I'm glad things are working out for you. I knew if I tried I could make a place for you in this world."

She gets teary-eyed at this, for some reason, and she, Hannibal and Will share a moment that Georgia is excluded from. She's not upset about the exclusion–it's clear the moment is about something they've been through. Something terrible. They've bonded, and hardened, like resin coating living things. Georgia has a thought, when all three of them are talking together, that they're like mannikins. Playing at being human. Not like everyone else. Not like the others. Replicants.

But then when everyone's comfortable and the food has come, and everyone's trying something from everyone else's plate, there's a moment. Hannibal looks at Will, and it's so soft. It's like he's looking at a kitten, or a baby. Or a baby kitten. And Georgia realizes that it's not that Hannibal has some kind of chokehold on Will. He's not holding him hostage. He doesn't have Stockholm Syndrome. That's love. And the way Will looks back is just. Worshipful.

Georgia wonders then, if Abigail is right. Could Hannibal really have endorsed Abigail helping her father kill girls who look like her? Could Will have known it too, and helped her escape? Could this prim and proper psychiatrist really, as Abigail has sworn was true, fed his guests human flesh?

It seems less and less likely as the dinner goes on.

Will describes seeing parts of Italy for the first time with Hannibal, and the elaborate lectures his traveling companion would (endearingly) give about every hill or statute or church or work of art. The entire table is laughing, and a waiter overhears and starts asking them about Italy, because the restaurant is family owned and they have an olive farm in Italy.

This starts Hannibal in on talking about his youth, and then another one of the waiters comes up, and this one starts speaking Italian to them. Soon enough they're doing an olive oil tasting which turns into a wine tasting, and everyone gets pretty drunk.

They're all feeling cheerful enough that when Hannibal and Will offer to walk them back to their place, everyone agrees this would be amazing. With Will and Hannibal there, they can cut through the park without being hassled by anyone and the weather is okay despite the late spring chill.

They're walking past a bar when a man steps out and pukes in the street–and some of it lands on Abigail's expensive leather boots.

It's not a big deal. They're in university, for god's sake. This kind of thing happens all the time. But Georgia happens to look at Hannibal's face. It's an expressionless mask, sort of. But there's a look in his eyes that speaks volumes.

He puts a hand on Will's arm. "Walk ahead. I would like to have a word with this young man."

Will sighs like he expected as much and doesn't really have the patience for Hannibal's bullshit today. "We're far from home, Hannibal. Don't do anything impulsive."

Hannibal smiles slightly. “I would like to get the young man’s business card, just in case Abigail’s boots need to be replaced.”

Will nods, and Hannibal sprints after the younger man. Pretty spryly, actually. There’s an athlete under that fancy suit.

As they all continue walking, Abigail smiles at Will. “I take it from that interaction that you’ve been keeping him in line.”

Will shoves his hands in his pockets and shrugs. “He mostly keeps himself in line, and keeps me from putting myself in danger. He hates rudeness, though. Sometimes it can be his blind spot. I just don’t want it to become his downfall, too.”

They get a little ahead, and Georgia realizes the significance of what they’re saying. Hannibal is going to kill that man, or at least, find out his identity so they can come back and kill him at some later date.

Georgia feels a momentary panic. She’s not like the others who’d sat at that dinner table. She hadn’t killed people because she liked it, or because she wanted to kill them. She only killed one person, and that was devastating because she had inadvertently killed her best friend. She was a victim of mental illness, not a psychopath. She’d never kill anyone now.

But when she looks at Abigail, she’s pretty sure Abby wouldn’t kill anyone now, either. Abigail had killed because of trauma and her father’s influence. The sick way she’d been raised. Georgia knows Abby helped her father kill those girls–she knows Abigail liked it. But Abigail needed to be influenced to kill again. She’d only killed that boy because of Hannibal’s influence. If Hannibal and Will gave her space, she’d grow out of it. And Will wanted to give her that space. He’d said as much.

And Abigail was responsible for deaths, yes. But she was responsible for Georgia’s life, too. God knows what would have happened to her without Abigail to look out for her. Georgia loved her fiercely, beyond limit, and without boundaries.

Maybe Hannibal was like Abigail. He’d been traumatized. Influenced. But he wasn’t young enough to grow out of it. That made him a sad kind of figure. Not one to be scared of, really. And Will–Georgia couldn’t help but love Will, even if he was going around killing people, or enabling Hannibal’s murders. He’d saved her. He’d been so compassionate with her. She’d had him send her a voice memo that was just his voice telling her she was alive, and she listened to it more than she’d liked to admit. She would protect him even if he was the worst person alive. And if he wanted Hannibal, then she’d protect Hannibal for Will.

So Georgia wouldn’t kill anyone else if her mental health stayed as good as it was right now. She was pretty sure about that. But if someone came after Abigail, Hannibal, or Will, she would have to rethink her position on murder.

And maybe that’s a fucked up definition of family, but it’s the only one she’s got.

Jack

Jack saw Freddie Lounds the day she was released from hospital after being beaten by Benjamin Worthington. She said again that she was convinced that she'd been sent to his home on purpose by Hannibal and Will, but thankfully, she said she wasn't going to publish her suspicions as a favor to Jack.

Jack was sure that had more to do with inflating her mystique at having found a serial killer all on her own–he was pretty sure she'd finally got that story that would be turned into a highly embellished movie one day–rather than any efforts to maintain her relationship with the FBI.

But the idea was in his mind when he went into the interview with Worthington. That was his only excuse for entertaining suspicions from Freddie Lounds, of all people.

They'd been letting the man cool his heels in lockup for quite a while. They wanted time to catalog all the evidence so they could present it properly, and Jack had kind of been waiting for Hannibal and Will to come back. Now that Jack knew Hannibal knew the guy–had been his therapist–Hannibal couldn't be involved in the interview process. But Will could still be there.

When Worthington was being prepped for the interview, Jack actually found himself telling Price and Zeller what Freddie had said.

Predictably, Price didn't believe it was true, "But man, wouldn't that be amazing if it was true? People should really throw serial killers at Freddie more often. Couldn't happen to a nicer person, really."

"She gets in our way sometimes, but she doesn't deserve to die," Jack said.

Price raised an eyebrow. "You hold tight to that thought the next time she sneaks somewhere she's not supposed to be, okay? Maybe you want me to remind you of it next time she publishes photos of a murder victim?"

"I wouldn't," Jack muttered, and Price laughed.

Zeller smirked. "Hannibal Lecter wouldn't say an unkind word to anyone. He's way too afraid of being rude. I swear his politeness is pathological. I could see Will sending Freddie Lounds into the path of a serial killer, though."

Price rolled his eyes. "You could see Will being a serial killer, given the right circumstances."

Jack frowned. "Will was kind of taunting Freddie. Provoking her. Not in an obvious way, but, you know–like in a Will way. You don't really think he could have done something like this, Z?"

Zeller's expression turned serious. "Jack, for Will to have done it, Hannibal would have had to have known Worthington was a serial killer from something he said in therapy and instead of reporting it to us or anyone else, he would have had to have told Will about it. I know he's sleeping with someone who technically was sort of his patient, but I don't think we have any justification to accuse him of being that unethical. And Will would have had to know Freddie was following him around and not fly into a rage about it. Come on. Will wouldn't just let her follow him around."

Jack didn't think too hard about the fact that the second part of what Z said was more convincing than the part about Hannibal being ethical. Not everyone knew that Hannibal and Jack had colluded to create an environment where Hannibal could report to Jack about Will's therapy, which, if you took out any technicalities and loopholes, was pretty unethical on both their parts.

"Come on. Will says weird shit. But he's never done anything bad to anyone who wasn't a serial killer, and Freddie might be annoying, but she's not a serial killer," Price said. He paused, then said, "Yet. She's not a serial killer yet. I mean I'm not ruling out her one day running out of content and just killing a bunch of people for clicks on her website."

Jack sighed, agreeing that he really had no reason to be concerned, and trying to put Freddie's accusations out of his mind.

Will claimed to have never met Worthington despite him being Hannibal's client, and so he and Jack were going to conduct the interrogation. He walked to Will's classroom and found him looking through files.

"Ready?"

Will looked up. "Yep. Sure you don't want Hannibal there? I know he couldn't join in the interrogation but he could be there to support Worthington. He offered. It might make Worthington more open to talking to us."

Jack frowned. If he really wanted to give credence to Freddie's accusations, seeing Worthington and Hannibal together was likely the best way. But this interrogation was likely to span days, so he could still contrive to put him and Hannibal in a room together later if he couldn't get rid of his nagging suspicions. "I don't particularly want Worthington to have support, to be honest. Let's get this over with."

Will nodded. He picked up the file and got up, and they started walking together to the interrogation room. Jack suddenly realized Will had probably been boning up on the case because he hadn't been involved in taking Worthington down.

Jack stopped walking and put a hand on Will's arm. "Did you have time to get a feel for this guy?"

"Absolutely, Jack. Like you said, let's get this over with."

They went into the room and sat down. Alana and the team were on the other side of the two way glass, and Worthington was already seated. He didn't look at Will as though he was

familiar with him, but he stared Jack down. “So you’re the famous Jack Crawford,” he said.

Jack frowned. “I’m Jack Crawford,” he said. He gave the information required for the recording, introduced Will, and opened his mouth to start questioning.

“You’re Will Graham?” he asked.

Will nodded.

Worthington looked at him with more interest but didn’t say why. Jack had to assume it was to do with Freddie’s articles.

During the interrogation, they played to type even though they hadn’t planned it out beforehand. Jack was the bad cop and shouted when he thought intimidation was required, and Will showed compassion and deep understanding of Worthington’s motives and drives. Two hours in, and Jack could tell Worthington was half in love with Will. Figuratively, of course.

Jack stood up, knowing that now that Worthington was talking freely about his crimes Will would be able to get more particulars about the murders alone than he would if Jack was in the room.

Jack joined the others behind the glass.

“Will’s amazing, isn’t he? To think, he didn’t even see any of the crime scenes,” Alana said.

Jack nodded.

“You don’t think Hannibal told him anything Will said in session, do you?” Alana asked.

Jack looked at her. “Of course not. I mean, even if he did, you’d be assuming Hannibal knew he Worthington was dropping bodies and didn’t report that to anyone, and I know you’re not making that accusation against Hannibal right now."

"Hannibal could have missed the signs at the time but could understand something about the killer from his sessions looking back on it knowing he's a killer. It would be unethical for us to use anything revealed to Hannibal in session to get him to confess."

"Will doesn't need to do anything unethical to understand killers, Alana. Come on. Is it really a surprise that a man whose entire job is to understand killers understands this one? Worthington's M.O. isn't even that weird. He kills happy couples because he's jealous. It's not like he's using diabetic people to grow mushrooms to try to relate to the rest of humanity or anything. And, oh yeah, Will totally understood that motivation like it was a completely normal idea."

She shrugged, her demeanor slightly apologetic, but she didn’t take anything back.

Jack knew she’d soured on both Will and Hannibal somehow since they’d become a couple. Jack suspected it was partially the fact that both had flirted with her constantly and now they seemed to view her with disdain, but he knew it was more than that. He could tell her about

Freddie's accusations–but why? He knew she was already struggling to get along with them. And why should he stir up trouble among his subordinates? They were already annoying enough without all that. Although he couldn't count on her ignorance about it; Freddie would probably tell Alana all about it herself, if it served her purposes.

He turned his attention to Will and Worthington.

Worthington was leaning close to Will, yearning in every angle of his body.

"No wonder he loves you," he said to Will.

Will frowned.

"I mean Dr. Lecter," Worthington said. "You're his boyfriend, aren't you?"

Will moved his chair further away from the table. "Let's keep it professional. Tell me about the first victim."

Alana laughed. "We're all so drawn to him. What is it about Will?"

"Speak for yourself," Zeller muttered.

Jack pulled Alana aside. "You're sounding a little bitter, here. Anything you need to tell me?"

Alana sighed. "No. I'm fine. I just. Sometimes I think Hannibal is the one who worries me the most and sometimes it's Will. And sometimes I try to be happy for them. But they give me a weird feeling. I don't know."

"You have to either get your feelings in line or stop talking about it," Jack said. "This is a workplace."

Alana frowned. "Of course. I trust Hannibal. And I trust Will. And I know you think they're a cute couple and they make each other better. But the way they are together…it isn't normal."

"Alana, tell me what you mean or stop making your feelings about your coworkers my problem," Jack said.

She sighed. "It's not a problem. It's just sometimes I look at the way killers and people who simply can't relate to other people are drawn to Will, and I wonder. I wonder why Hannibal is so drawn to him. I've seen Hannibal have affairs and romantic dalliances throughout our friendship and he's never once fallen for someone the way he has for Will. I mean if Will is catnip for killers, why does Hannibal want him so much?"

"You wanted him too at one time, if I'm not mistaken," Jack said.

"Yeah, I'm not saying you'd have to be a crazed killer to find him attractive," Alana said. "I'm just saying, in general, people who can't make a connection with anyone else can make a connection to him. And suddenly the fact that Hannibal's relationships were entirely superficial until he met the guy with hyper empathy makes me think about what a damned robot Hannibal is."

“I thought you said we didn’t have a problem, Alana. Hannibal is one of your best friends. Are you saying he’s as bad as Worthington somehow? The guy who had random body parts all over his barn?”

“I’m not saying anything,” Alana said soberly. She crossed her arms on her chest. “Sometimes I think this work I do with you on occasion is making me a bit paranoid. Maybe I should take a little break.”

“We all need a break sometimes,” Jack said. He decided to make sure she took some time off. Maybe he'd even take steps to make sure she saw someone about possible PTSD. It wouldn't be surprising if she had a trauma response, after all she'd seen.

Alana walked out. They got actionable information from Will’s interview, as always, and they went to work finding the rest of the bodies and connecting the body parts to the victims.

Jack mostly put Freddie’s accusations out of his mind, but Alana’s stuck with him. He spent a lot of time with Hannibal, though. Almost as much time as he’d spent with Will. He found Hannibal to be both classy and educated, but also unfailingly kind. And Will, well. Despite Will’s tendency to sometimes question Jack's authority and act like a nuisance, Will was one of his best friends. He couldn't help but think back to how Will had sat with him when he’d first realized Bella was sick.

He’d been so happy to see Will and Hannibal happy together. Why couldn’t he get these suspicions out of his head?

Finally, he got exasperated with himself and simply asked Will about it one night when he was over at his and Hannibal’s place for dinner.

“You can’t tell me you didn’t taunt Freddie Lounds about her suspicions,” Jack said.

Will just laughed.

Hannibal, who was expertly plating food, joined in his boyfriend’s laughter. “This is the man who once told Freddie she should be worried because he imagines killing people for a living.”

“That’s definitely not what I said,” Will said.

“It’s not far off. You wanted her to be worried about you.”

“There’s a certain type of person that Freddie Lounds respects. Mild mannered academics are not part of that group. If she thinks I’m a psycho, maybe she’ll give me a wide berth,” Will joked.

“Come on, Will,” Jack said. “We’ve talked about this before.”

Hannibal stopped his elegant plating and looked into Jack's eyes. “Jack, to imagine there’s anything Will could say to Freddie Lounds at this point to put her at ease is perhaps overly optimistic. Her opinion of Will is fixed now, and has started to spill over on me. Her negative opinion of us is not affecting how you see us, is it?”

“Of course not,” Jack said, his voice possibly just a little too hearty.

“Good. Then let’s eat,” Hannibal said.

That was reassuring, but even so, Jack couldn’t resist saying something to Worthington when he saw him in the holding cell before his transfer to jail for his arraignment.

“You know, Freddie Lounds accused Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham of throwing her in your path to get you to kill her,” he said as he waited for Worthington to sign some documents.

Worthington scratched his chin. “Dr. Lecter? He’s kind of an unconventional therapist, but I never told him I murdered anyone. So he'd have to be a really good guesser to be able to know my nature just by looking at me.”

Jack felt the tension release from his shoulders. Will and Hannibal would have had to somehow guess that Lounds would hack the Bentley's GPS, too. It was all so implausible, actually. “And he went to your house?”

“Yeah. A couple of times,” Worthington said.

So Hannibal and Will’s version of events–and Freddie's–would both make sense if you scrubbed each of them of their suspicions of each other.

Jack finally felt ready to rid himself of the disquiet he’d felt when someone accused one–two–of his consultants of putting a reporter in danger.

Worthington looked up from his documents. “You know, it’s funny,” he said.

“What’s that?” Jack asked.

“Come to think of it, we talked about Freddie Lounds, Dr. Lecter and I,” Worthington said.

“Oh?” Jack asked.

“Yeah,” Worthington said. “I remember it well. Dr. Lecter said he read her work religiously but couldn’t help but find her rude. And I said if she ever came to my house and invaded my privacy the way she did other people, I’d probably kill her. Stand your ground, and all that.”

Jack’s smile faded.

But it was probably just a coincidence, right?

Chilton

Chapter Notes

Chilton is so fun to write it's ridiculous.

Frederick Chilton adjusted his tie again in the mirror, then let the frustration get the best of him and pulled the tie completely open to start from scratch.

It’s not that he was nervous. He’d known Hannibal for years and couldn’t actually understand the hype. Sure, he was a nobleman from some obscure European country who was well read, cultured and handsome, and his dinner parties were legendary. But arguably, Chilton’s job at the BSHCI was a much higher status position than Hannibal’s measly private practice. Plus, maybe Hannibal’s scholarly work was slightly more respected, but his published work hadn’t reached the masses in the same way Chilton’s had.

Chilton had an ability to make complex psychological concepts digestible by regular laymen, and his bank account showed how lucrative it had been for him.

Unmasking the Chesapeake Ripper in his own facility had got him a book deal and a host of television appearances. Even if not everyone agreed that Gideon really was the Ripper, and those neo-Ripper killings had cast some doubt on Gideon’s claims–Chilton and his publisher maintained there were distinct features in the Neo-Ripper’s killings that meant he couldn’t be the Ripper. At any rate, the public didn’t seem to care that Gideon wasn’t “officially” the Chesapeake Ripper. Chilton liked to think they were reading the book for Chilton’s prose and his insight into the human mind rather than his proximity to the Ripper, anyway.

No, what had Chilton concerned about the state of his tie was the opinion of a man who probably wouldn’t even be wearing one at the dinner.

Will Graham.

He decided he was satisfied with the tie and left it.

On the drive he practiced what he would say when Graham asked him to take over for Hannibal as his therapist. It was the only reason he could see why they’d invite him to their dinner party. Either that, or Hannibal wanted to interview Abel Gideon–but since he and Will were in the camp who didn’t think he was anything more than a run-of-the-mill family annihilator, this seemed unlikely.

“I would be happy to lend you my ear,” he would begin, “But my time is valuable. I can’t guarantee that I won’t write about you.”

But he knew that Alana Bloom was right. There was no way to anonymously write about Will Graham. Anything written about him would either have to be written with his explicit permission, or after his death. There simply wasn't another person on earth who had that exact cocktail of neurosis and experiences. Any honest portrayal of him in a case study might as well publish his name alongside it.

He knew Will would never give him permission, so being honest about his intention to publish wouldn't work.

He could deal with the censure of a scold like Alana Bloom, but he had a feeling Hannibal wouldn't be as civilized about it. Or indeed, the state psychiatry board.

But then, if Hannibal and Will were planning on asking him to be Will's psychiatrist, they must trust him with Will's fragile psyche. And why wouldn't they? He was an expert. The top of his field.

Chilton was confused at first when he arrived at Hannibal and Will's new home and realized that it was actually quite a large dinner party. His heart sank a little when he realized they probably weren't going to ask him to act as Will's psychiatrist. This was likely nothing more than a networking dinner, and that's why he'd been included.

At least he might have a chance to talk with Graham. He might be a damaged sort of genius, but every time Chilton talked to him he learned another tidbit about his fractured psyche. This could still be good for him.

It was Chilton's first time in the new place, and he had to concede that it was much more comfortable, somehow, than Hannibal's old place. There was a softness to it. Less skulls and pictures of swans raping women.

He wondered if he should compliment Will on bringing a woman's touch to Hannibal's décor. He sniggered into his wine, thinking he shouldn't. He'd probably be accused of being homophobic.

It was impossible to make a joke these days.

"Frederick!" Hannibal said, approaching to say hello.

"Hannibal. I must thank you for the invitation. I always enjoy your dinner parties."

"I knew you were the best addition to our evening when I read your book on Abel Gideon. I simply must pick your brain about it."

That didn't make Chilton nervous. Much. "Where's that delightful partner of yours?"

A woman Chilton didn't know in a bizarre orange fascinator giggled delightedly. "Oh, the expert on serial killers cross-examining the public's darling about the Ripper. What fun!"

Hannibal put a reassuring hand on Chilton's shoulder. "Nothing as formal as all that. We simply had to know what you thought about the new Ripper kill. I'm sorry. You call him the Neo-Ripper, don't you?"

Chilton took a swig of his wine. “I hadn’t heard there’d been a new body found.”

“Jack kept a lid on it,” Will said, sneaking into the corner of their little group. “But it made the press earlier today. A full sounder, all at once.”

“Three victims?” Chilton said faintly.

“Well, even more, if you include the others,” Will said. He took a sip of the amber liquid he was drinking. Chilton was jealous he appeared to have access to scotch while everyone else was stuck with wine. He could use something a little stronger.

“What do you mean?” Chilton asked.

“The Ripper left evidence at the scene. Evidence to suggest that he was the copycat killer who seemed to be hounding the BSU. And more importantly, he left evidence he killed Miriam Lass.”

Chilton didn’t have to ask who Miriam Lass was. He’d been on the Ripper task force when the pretty trainee had gone missing. She’d gone missing while looking for the Ripper, and was definitely a confirmed victim.

He was sunk.

Chilton shrugged and then frowned. “Wait, how do you know it’s Miriam Lass and the copycat killer’s victims if the bodies and evidence were discovered today?”

“He labeled his work,” Will said, almost fondly. “He–well, maybe I should show you tomorrow. I wouldn’t want you to get it wrong in your retraction.”

Chilton almost broke his wine glass in Will Graham’s smug eyeball and rotated it. But there were people watching, and more importantly, he was being invited to a Ripper scene again. Jack had replaced Chilton with Will and never looked back, and maybe getting to see another Ripper scene was worth the humiliation.

Chilton smiled winningly. “If it’s true that this is a Ripper scene, that means Gideon has been fixated enough on the Ripper to create false memories of himself committing his crimes. That’s fascinating. Fascinating enough to publish, probably.”

“Yeah,” Will said. “It’s like Satanic panic all over again.”

The woman with the orange fascinator frowned. “I thought Satanic panic was caused by psychiatrists planting false memories in children using suggestion?”

Chilton forced a laugh. “You know that whole thing has been traced to one psychiatrist and his female patient. And get this. He married her in the end. What kind of psychiatrist would do that?”

“Shocking,” Orange fascinator said.

“Yes, shocking,” Hannibal said.

Hannibal opened his mouth to say something else, and one of the caterers came and stole him away. Chilton was almost sorry. Hannibal's society take downs were legendary, and Chilton wasn't entirely sure if he had scored a point or just made Hannibal mad.

He turned to Will. "So Miriam's body has been found at last. I knew her, you know."

"I know," Will said. "It wasn't her whole body. Just her arm."

"What condition was it in?" Chilton asked.

Will shrugged. "I really shouldn't be discussing that in this venue. It's an active investigation. I'll show you tomorrow."

Chilton felt vindicated by this. Of course he should be let in on aspects of the case that the public wasn't privy to. "It's a wonder you brought it up at all," Chilton said. "Isn't everything you said confidential?"

"It would have been," Will said, "But everything we said was in Tattlecrime.com by this afternoon. The Ripper didn't send his little evidence buffet to Jack, he sent it to Freddie Lounds."

"My goodness," Chilton said.

Will got whisked away by another guest, and Chilton was left to tally his hits and jabs. He was pretty sure he'd lost the verbal sparring match, although he'd scored with the dig about Hannibal and Will being formerly patient and doctor.

Chilton was eating appetizers and formulating a plan to drop a hint to Freddie Lounds about going on record about Will and Hannibal's personal relationship when they were called into dinner.

Chilton found himself far from the action at the head of the table. Hannibal and Will were smirking and telling jokes, and he didn't hear half of it because some weird old lady kept on telling him about her garden.

Finally, there were drinks in the parlor and the guests who had been invited to stay over retired to their accommodations.

Hannibal pulled Chilton aside. "If you've drank more than you think you ought to have, I did hire drivers to take inebriated guests home."

If he'd known that at the beginning of the night, he probably would have gotten plastered. So actually it was pretty good he hadn't known. "Thank you. I'll be fine."

Hannibal nodded and turned to another guest.

Chilton sighed and resigned himself to a long drive back home. He wondered what you had to do to get an invitation to sleep over–but then, why the hell would he want to stay over? He'd just end up sleeping badly and having to hear more about rose aphids over whatever

dumbass fancy breakfast Hannibal made. He would be better to drive home feeling fresh and then go to the latest Ripper scene with Will first thing in the morning. Neo-Ripper.

Chilton wondered if he should call his agent on the ride home. They had discussed what they'd do if it turned out Abel wasn't the Ripper, but maybe that was premature. Maybe the Ripper had worked with a partner. If he went to see Abel tonight, he could ask him about the possibility of him working with a partner.

But, Chilton was tired–and frankly, disappointed he wasn't Will Graham's choice for psychiatrist–and he'd rather go back to his comfortable bed and sleep. Just forget all about the Chesapeake Ripper and snuggle under the covers for a few hours.

When he made it into bed, it was only midnight. Not the earliest he'd ever gone to bed, but he wouldn't be dragging all day tomorrow, either.

He woke up, not sure what had roused him. The alarm clock said 4:30. He struggled to sit up, feeling sluggish with sleep and wiping his eyes.

"You'll lie back down if you know what's good for you," a voice said. A familiar voice, but one he couldn't quite place. Like it was being played through a filter.

"What are you doing in my bedroom?" Chilton said. His voice sounded strange, like he was speaking too slowly.

Firm, impersonal hands pushed him so he was lying on his back. He felt a prick on his neck and felt numb from his neck down. The hands moved away and he could no longer move.

"What the hell is happening?" he said, his voice slurred. "Did you drug me?"

"It was necessary, Frederick. We're going to perform surgery."

That voice Chilton knew (he'd know that accent anywhere), and it made him realize who the first voice was. "Hannibal? Will? What the hell are you doing?"

"I saw a little, I dunno, preview of what Dr. Abel Gideon would do to you if he could. In retaliation for what you did to him. For making him think he was the Ripper. I believe you owe him for all you've taken from him. And so for tonight I'll borrow his design, with The Ripper's help," the first voice, Will, said. He unbuttoned Chilton's pajama top and pushed both sides of the shirt to either side. He wiped something on Chilton's stomach, and Chilton smelled iodine.

"Why would the Ripper help you?" Chilton slurred.

"Because I want to eat you. Don't worry. I won't take anything you need too much. And I assure you, I'm an excellent cook. I won't let your organs be wasted," Hannibal, or the Ripper, said.

Suddenly, Chilton was blinking at a bright light. He couldn't really see the faces of the two men who were standing over his bed, but he could tell they were wearing full surgical gear

and medical masks, including splatter shields. Perhaps that was why the voices had seemed a little distorted, or possibly it was the drugs they'd given him.

He tried valiantly to move, but he couldn't budge. A mask descended over his mouth and pure oxygen made him giddy. "You should thank me," Will said, adjusting the mask. "When Abel did this, he did it in really unsanitary conditions assisted by Freddie Lounds. Not that it managed to kill you. I think you're a bit of a cockroach. Like, in the sense that it seems kind of impossible to kill you. Not that I've tried to kill you. Much."

"What did I ever do to you, Will?" Chilton said.

"Sorry, couldn't hear you with that mask on," Will said. He adjusted Chilton's pillow so that he could see his own stomach easily, then he stepped back.

Hannibal approached, a scalpel in his hand.

"No, no, please! Whatever I did, I'll take it back. I'll print the retraction. I'll go back on all the talk shows and tell them I was wrong. I was so wrong Hannibal. Please don't do it. Don't do it," he said.

Hannibal ignored him and Chilton tried in vain to shout something that would make him stop, but he was incoherent. Finally he gave up, and all he could do was watch in horror as the scalpel bit into his skin. He couldn't feel anything, but Will propping him up on the pillow ensured that he could see everything.

The surgery seemed to go on for a long time. Will and Hannibal spoke quietly to one another. At one point Hannibal encouraged Will to put his hand into his stomach, and Chilton watched as Will dug deeper and deeper. Eventually he pulled something out.

It was a kidney.

"No no no. I need that. Don't take it from me," Chilton said.

"But it will be delicious," Hannibal said. He detached the kidney and gave it to Will, who turned away with it and returned with his gloved hands empty.

"What next?" Will asked.

"Gallbladder. You might thank me for this. Some people have theirs removed as an elective surgery."

Chilton rolled his eyes. He knew that. He felt a little better about the gallbladder than the kidney, that was true. And he felt better that it seemed Hannibal was the one removing it, not Will. Maybe Will had lost his taste for surgery.

"Please Will, stop him," he said through his mask.

Will looked at him blankly. "I don't know how," he said tonelessly.

Chilton watched, paralyzed with fear and disgust, as they removed his spleen and appendix. Then, he watched as they removed a portion of his intestines. Hannibal quickly and efficiently reattached or otherwise sewed off the places where the organs had been attached. If Chilton hadn't been terrified and angry, he would have admired his work.

But then Will reached it, and somehow pulled out his heart. Then one of his lungs. Chilton screamed soundlessly, but there was nothing he could do. His consciousness faded and everything went black.

When he woke up, he sighed in relief. Everything was fine. He was in his own bedroom. The bedside clock said seven am, and the horrible surgery had all just been a dream. He ran a hand down his stomach to reassure himself, and he felt something oddly prickly.

Stitches.

Chilton screamed, then grabbed his phone from the charger on his table and called 911.

He was so panicked that by the time the ambulance arrived they had no choice but to sedate him.

When he woke up in the hospital, someone (maybe a social worker or a psychiatrist, he wasn't sure) told him that the paramedics hadn't been sure what was wrong with him, but they had seen a beautiful note written in fine calligraphy tacked above his bed. It was from the Chesapeake Ripper, and it gave the exact details of what had been done to him.

When he'd arrived at the hospital, the surgical staff had opened him up. They found he had been relieved of his appendix, spleen, one kidney, about a foot of large intestine, and his gallbladder. The work had been done so well they didn't feel the need to change any of it– they simply closed him back up again. The other organs he remembered Will and Hannibal taking from him had likely been a hallucination, according to the hospital staff. And as for Will and Hannibal's involvement–he told the police everything, and then didn't hear anything more about it for a week, when Jack walked in.

"Well, we investigated everything you said, and now we know what happened," Jack said.

"Okay," Chilton said. He took a sip of the bland shake the hospital had given him. They were still experimenting to find the best kind of food for his new circumstance.

"You went home from Hannibal and Will's dinner party and went to sleep around twelve, according to you. Then, you heard something and woke up at 4:30. At this point we think you'd already been given some kind of drug to make you pliable and perhaps even induce a dreamlike state. The Chesapeake Ripper and his accomplice performed surgery on you. You passed out from either the horror of it all or because they gave you another sedative, and then woke up and had the presence of mind to call 911."

"I remember all that, Jack," Chilton said. "Tell me something I don't know."

"I was with Will and Hannibal from the hours of 3 am until 5 am at a crime scene in downtown Baltimore. Even Freddie Lounds was there. It's not possible that they were the

ones who performed surgery. The fact that Hannibal is such a capable surgeon–and indeed, the fact that he likes to eat organ meat–did give me pause."

"That can't be. I heard their voices."

"You were drugged, Chilton. And the last people you saw were Will and Hannibal. Not only that, but they confronted you at the dinner party and you had negative feelings about them at the time. You imposed their identities on those of the Chesapeake Ripper and his accomplice to make them more familiar and comforting. It's actually really irritating, since it means you'll be unable to give us any clues as to the Ripper's identity."

"Believe me, there was nothing comforting about either Hannibal or Will when they were carving out my organs," Chilton said.

"The Ripper and his accomplice. I'm telling you, Chilton, I was with them. There's no way that Will and Hannibal had time to perform surgery on you from the middle of the crime scene."

"What if…what if they changed the clock? Made me think it was later than it was, but really it was just after midnight? They could have followed me home."

Jack shook his head. "It doesn't work. Hannibal cleaned up with the catering staff until a quarter to one. The logistics don't match up. It would take him another half hour to get to your place, and then they'd have to prep you and perform the surgery within a twenty minute window in order to get to downtown Baltimore in time to see me there at 3."

"What direction did they drive up from?"

"Chilton, it's not them. I promise you, it's not them."

"Just my mind playing tricks on me, huh?" he said. Jack nodded. Chilton reflected for a moment that it was ironic that his mind was telling him something completely different from what had apparently really happened–which is what he'd inadvertently done to Abel Gideon with his psychic driving. He frowned. "Do you think this could be Abel Gideon? I know he's in my hospital, but maybe he somehow got instructions out to some of his disciples. Now that people think he's the Chesapeake Ripper, he gets a lot of mail."

"You're sure that the Ripper mentioned Gideon's name?"

"Yeah," Chilton said. "What if someone working on Gideon's behalf came to the Ripper and they decided to blame me for Gideon taking credit for the Ripper's work? Take out a pound of my flesh, so to speak."

"It could be," Jack said. "We'll investigate that angle."

"Do you think I could talk to Will and Hannibal?"

"Do you think that's wise?"

“I want to see for myself, you know? If I can talk to them, and they’re just the same pretentious douchebag and socially awkward freak, maybe I won’t feel so convinced it was them, you know?”

Jack nodded. “Alright. I’ll see if they agree. Your accusations made life a little awkward for them for a while. The police searched their home, and their activities for the last two weeks were sifted through with a fine tooth comb. They might not want anything to do with you anymore.”

But Hannibal and Will did agree to see him, and they fit a hospital visit into their schedule the very next day.

Hannibal was dressed in a ridiculously loud plaid suit, and Will was wearing a tweed coat over a gray button up and jeans. They looked small and harmless compared to how they’d looked in his imagination.

“How are you feeling?” Hannibal asked.

“How did I taste?” Chilton asked.

They both looked at him, wide-eyed and horrified.

Finally Will cleared his throat. “I hoped you’d moved on from the belief that it was us that did that awful stuff to you,” he said earnestly. “We didn’t hurt you, Frederick. I promise you.”

Chilton couldn’t believe it. Even when Jack had told him that they had an alibi, he’d still firmly believed that they were the ones who had performed the surgery. But looking at them now–at their sad, innocent faces–he knew he’d been mistaken. He chuckled, trying to play his comment about how he tasted off as a joke. “Too soon?”

Will’s face contorted into an angry frown, and Hannibal put a placating hand on his arm. “Now, Will. No matter what inconvenience Chilton’s accusations caused for us, he’s been through far worse. And as his colleagues, it’s our duty to help him through it.”

Will sighed heavily. “Of course. Is there anything we can do to help you, Frederick?”

Frederick nodded. “You can catch that asshole, the Chesapeake Ripper, and give him a piece of my mind.”

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. “I’m surprised you don’t think he has enough pieces of you already.”

Will gasped. “Not the time for puns, Hannibal,” he said, his face scandalized.

“Of course. My apologies,” Hannibal said.

Chilton smiled. Maybe, now that they felt like they had a responsibility to help him get better, they’d lay off their accusations of psychic driving. And all it cost him was a few organs!

Jimmy

Chapter Notes

Jimmy Price is not, as far as I can tell, openly gay on the show. But Scott Thompson has been openly gay since 1990 and I grew up watching him on Kids in the Hall. People go on about being grateful for the slightest crumbs of gay representation and I'm always so confused because I watched him over 30 years ago, as Buddy Cole, ramble on hilariously (and explicitly) about his gay sexual affairs on national TV during the AIDS crisis so I decided to add Jimmy being gay as tribute to him. 1990 was not a great time to come out as gay and have blatant gay content on a TV show–he was really brave to do it. Big love and respect to Scott Thompson, always!

Even though much of this fic takes place at a dinner party it is a different dinner party than the last one (which might be confusing idk). Poor Will! So many dinner parties.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The second Jimmy Price knew he could come out as gay without being fired–January 3rd, 1994–he did so. He thought, naively, it turned out, that all the other gay employees would do the same.

They didn't. Not then, and not for many years afterward. He wasn't the only gay employee, but he was certainly a rarity. He "weirded people out" or "made them uncomfortable", according to the employee reviews his supervisors made sure to let him see. The FBI at that time no longer made it a policy to blackmail gay employees into quitting, but they didn't make it comfortable for them, either, even though they had official policies against discrimination.

So he gravitated to Jack's insular and strange little group. The group that people were drawn to and repelled by in equal measure–the one that people were advised to cycle out of every six months because the stress of looking at that much human filth wore on a person.

Jack didn't care if Price was gay as long as he stuck around and ran the lab the way he wanted it run. When Zeller joined, he proved to be obnoxious in most ways but he was not a bigot. Beverly couldn't care less about sexual orientation either way.

But the fact was, by the time Price started working with Will and Hannibal, he'd been an openly gay man in a mostly straight professional environment for more than twenty years. He knew so much about closet cases he could have written a book on the subject. He knew more about closets than Marie Kondo. He could clock a closet case at fifty yards and he was never wrong.

With such legendary gaydar, Zeller certainly had questions when Hannibal and Will were suddenly dating–and apparently very much in love–without Price even noticing.

And Price didn't really have any answers.

Will and Hannibal had some kind of mild-melding Vulcan thing going on, from what he could tell. They were different from each other in most ways but connected through their fascination with murder. As much as Price and Zeller looked at each other, all creeped out, when Will said something "as" a killer, they knew the feeling of being fascinated with murder. They wouldn't be working for Jack if they didn't. But there was something intellectual–or murdersexual?--about Hannibal and Will's love affair that weirded Price out.

He spent a lot of time with them, and yeah sure there was some tension between the two of them. For a while there he'd thought they were literally trying to kill each other. Now that they were living together, the tension was different, but still not entirely sexual. More like secretive. Like they were playing a game only the two of them knew about.

The little looks and the weird puns were actually getting to the point where Price was going to ask Jack about it when they were all invited to Will and Hannibal's new place for a dinner party. The invitation thoughtfully included a place to stay over if finding a ride after drinking all night would be an issue.

Zeller was currently single but snapped up the invitation despite being a dick to Will since day one. Beverly was going, of course, since she was actually friends with them, and bringing a date. Jack was also going stag. He hadn't dated once since his wife had died. Price brought a date, and the two of them opted to stay overnight.

They looked around curiously as they entered the great room, filled about halfway with guests.

"How are they living like this on a civil servant's salary?" asked his date, a handsome, slightly younger man with striking blue eyes named Tony.

"Hannibal is a psychiatrist and a count, although I'm not sure being a count comes with any money if you come from a place the Soviets took over," Jimmy said, sipping his wine.

"I'm sure a lot of the aristocrats managed to get their money out. Or kept it in Swiss bank accounts all along," Tony said. "So how did this FBI professor catch his eye?"

"Well, wait till you see him. He's kind of beautiful. They both are," Jimmy said.

"Oh, were they your work crushes before they got together?" Tony said, his voice excited rather than jealous.

"Strangely, no," Jimmy said. "Just never could see either of them that way. They never even tweaked my gaydar."

"Probably a proximity thing," Tony said wisely.

Jimmy didn't disagree out loud, but he definitely didn't agree that it was just proximity. Tony was dazzled by Hannibal's polish, cheekbones and fashion sense, and Will's fragile beauty, and Jimmy was more baffled than ever about what he didn't see in them.

The food was delicious, if a little rich, and the wine flowed liberally. Jimmy had had issues with alcohol in the past but managed to cut down rather than quit completely, so it wasn't wine that kept him up that night after they'd all retired to their rooms, but rather butter. What he needed was some kind of antacid or maybe a nice ginger tea. But you can't exactly go root around in someone's kitchen for that stuff. In the end he decided to go have a little walk around the yard.

Jimmy found the door, walked around in the yard a little, burped a few times, and felt well enough to go back to his room. If only he could find it.

Somehow he took a wrong turn on the ground floor looking for the stairs and ended up in a rather extensive library. Jimmy wasn't a huge reader but the aesthetic kind of sucked him in–especially after midnight in a fabulous mansion. He walked further into the room. It was similar in design to Hannibal's office, with high ceilings and a ladder up to the second floor. Jimmy wondered why they hadn't included the library–surely one of the most impressive parts of the house–in the tour.

He walked further in to read some of the titles on the leather-bound spines, and that's when he heard a groan.

On the other side of the room, a door was open, and he saw Will perched on an oversized wooden desk while Hannibal loomed over him. Will tipped his head up invitingly, and Hannibal brought his lips down to ravish Will's mouth.

Jimmy had the bizarre thought that these two fuck. Like this is not a meeting of the minds or an intellectual thoughtgasm. Well, it's probably all that, and they also fuck.

He looked away, embarrassed to have caught them in a private moment, and then started to back away as quietly as he could. He snuck one more peek, and in that moment Will lay back on the desk in abandon and hooked his leg around Hannibal's body, bringing him down on top of him.

Hannibal laughed and murmured something, and Jimmy felt a stab of arousal that he, well, he really didn't want to feel. Gross. He was an accidental voyeur, dammit, not some kind of creep!

He backed out quietly with a bit more urgency, and then, with a few false starts and wrong turns, managed to find his room.

Tony woke up as Jimmy slipped into bed. "What happened?" he asked.

Jimmy knew the question wasn't a real one. It was just the random words that came out of Tony's mouth when he got woken up. But he couldn't stop himself from replying. "I totally saw our hosts when they were about to bone," he said.

Tony stirred himself to more wakefulness. “That sounds hot.”

“You have no idea,” Jimmy said.

“This is a real full service dinner party. Dinner and a show,” Tony said. He turned back over and was asleep in an almost unrealistic amount of time.

Jimmy tried to forget what he’d seen. Like yes it was hot but you don’t want to think about your creepy coworkers as hot. He really thought he’d succeeded until they (Will, Hannibal and all the other guests who’d stayed over) sat down to eat breakfast. He kept on having intrusive sexy thoughts about them and it was not cool. And what was worse, was he was pretty sure they at least noticed that there was something off about him.

The next Monday morning, Jimmy was relieved that Hannibal hadn’t been brought in to consult. He wasn’t so lucky with Will.

He tried to avoid him for most of the morning, but eventually they were the only two people left in the lab around ten.

“Did you have a good time at our place this weekend?” Will asked.

“Oh yeah! Of course. You know your better half’s hospitality is legendary. Are you fishing for compliments now? I never would have thought you were the type.”

“I definitely don’t care about the status of my and Hannibal’s collective reputation for hospitality. In fact, if you could spread the idea around that you had a terrible time and no one should ever visit, that would be fine with me,” Will said. “A few less dinner parties wouldn’t exactly break my heart.” He sighed. “No, I just feel like you’re avoiding looking at me or something. What’s that about?”

“Nothing! No. I’m just. Okay, I’ll give it to you straight,” Jimmy said, determined that he’d just tell the truth. It’s not like it happened on purpose, right?

“Sure,” Will said.

Jimmy lost his nerve. “My date–Tony–he’s been begging me to ask you to ask Hannibal for the recipes for those crab canapes. But I don’t, you know, care to do that? But I promised. So I thought if I just avoided you I could pretend he hadn’t asked me to pressure you for something I don’t even want.”

Will laughed. “You must seriously like this Tony guy if you’re letting a promise to him tie you all up in knots.”

“I don’t know. It’s more that I hate an awkward scene. It’s either one awkward scene with a guy I might not even keep dating or an awkward scene at work everyday.”

“Don’t break up with the poor guy to avoid an awkward conversation,” Will said. He laughed again.

“I bet you a dollar you’ve actually done that. You’re way more likely to break up with someone to avoid an awkward conversation than I am.”

“One time I kissed someone to avoid an awkward conversation. I’m more of an avoid an awkward conversation by making it more awkward guy. I just dial the awkwardness up to eleven and then hope that makes them avoid me from then on.”

“Yeah, that tracks,” Jimmy said.

Will chuckled again and let Jimmy avoid him for a while. But Hannibal got called in on Wednesday and he took Jimmy aside. Jimmy hoped it was about the canape recipe–but no such luck.

“I hope you haven’t been feeling awkward,” Hannibal began.

“Who me? Awkward? That’s crazy talk,” Jimmy said.

“I know you saw Will and I in the library,” Hannibal said.

“What?” Jimmy froze. “How do you know that? You didn’t even look over at me.”

“The cologne you were wearing that night is really quite distinctive, and combined with the red wine I saw you drinking at dinner it couldn’t have been anyone else. I also know that you left as soon as you realized we were having a private moment, and that you were polite enough to not interrupt us. I really don’t know why you’re feeling out of sorts about it, given all that.”

Jimmy huffed in annoyance. “Can’t we just acknowledge that we both know what happened and never speak of it again?”

“I don’t think that would be the most productive course of action, do you?”

Jimmy sighed in defeat. “I guess not. Look, do you mind if we talk in confidence? Like, do you think I could treat you like a psychiatrist?”

“I think I could survive the novelty of being treated like a psychiatrist,” Hannibal said, a slight smile evident for a few moments before his expression became neutral once more.

“Okay, so I never thought about the two of you in that context. Like I never thought about you getting it on. Which. Why would I? I’m not a weirdo who pictures people I work with having sex all the time. But now I kind of keep on thinking about it. And I thought avoiding you two–especially when you’re together–might help.”

“There are many ways to deal with unwanted or intrusive thoughts,” Hannibal said. “I can help you with that, if you’d allow it.”

“It’s not like I’m resisting the urge to stick a pencil in my eye or something. It’ll pass. Just be cool if I can’t look the two of you in the eye for a few weeks.”

“I don’t think that’s a healthy approach,” Hannibal said.

“Well what do you suggest? Exposure therapy?” Jimmy said. He immediately regretted saying it, even slapping a hand over his mouth as if he could retroactively stop himself from speaking.

“I don’t think exposing myself to you–or Will exposing himself for that matter–will help,” Hannibal said.

“Maybe I could just watch a lot of porn,” Jimmy suggested from a place beyond shame. He felt like he was somewhere about six feet above his head, spiraling.

“So are you seeing what you saw in the library play out again, or imagining new scenarios?”

“Why do you want to know the specifics?” Jimmy asked, squinting.

“Why to help you, of course,” Hannibal said.

Torture him, more likely , Jimmy thought. Thankfully he only thought it and didn’t say it out loud this time. He sucked up his objections and imagined he was in a doctor’s office talking about some embarrassing health problem. “I know the two of you are beautiful men, but I had just never seen you that way. I didn’t even clock you as gay or bi or whatever it is you both are and my gaydar is usually infallible.”

“So it’s not that you can’t get the actual thing you saw out of your head, it’s that you don’t like the change in the way you see Will and I,” Hannibal said.

“I guess that’s as close to what I’m feeling as I can get,” Jimmy said.

“So you find us attractive?”

“Oh my god! This conversation is over,” Jimmy said.

Hannibal laughed quietly. “I’m sorry. I couldn’t resist. I do think you’re right. With a little time and strategic avoidance, we should all be back to normal soon.”

“You’re the worst Dr. Lecter,” Jimmy said.

Jimmy avoided them for a while, and then things got back to normal. He managed to stop thinking about the embarrassing moment where he’d practically walked in on them. But now when they exchanged a secretive glance, he no longer thought *what are those two weirdos keeping from us?* He thought *oh god I hope they’re not about to bang in the bathroom* . It wasn’t exactly a fair thought–it’s not like he’d walked in on them at work. They’d been in their own house. But he thought it all the same.

The murder puns that he’d been kind of concerned about in a maybe-Jack-should-hear-I’m-concerned way suddenly just fell under the category of awkward flirting.

And if there was ever a moment where Jimmy was trying to sleep and random thoughts wouldn’t stop flooding his brain where he wondered if they’d let him see them that way on purpose to change the way he thought about them, well, he never mentioned it to anyone out loud.

Chapter End Notes

Some people asked about the timeline in the last chapter. Hannibal does the surgery very quickly, because he genuinely doesn't care if Chilton survives, (plus he's anticipating Chilton'll get medical treatment as soon as he wakes up) and they leave him in the care of Will's bro, who closes the wound (he practiced on an orange!). Chilton is so arrogant (but also such a bad surgeon) that he doesn't believe doing the surgery quickly is possible, so is convinced by Jack's arguments (also he remembers the surgery as taking a long time because of the trauma and drugs). The clocks are manipulated as well–even the one in Chilton's car. He might have noticed that the time was different on his phone, but didn't, because it was only a 15 min increase. The fact that they're called out to a crime scene is too coincidental for Jack–and it's a Ripper scene so Hannibal as the Ripper couldn't kill someone and also host a dinner party at the same time, but this scene was created in advance by Hannibal and left for the police by Will's bro, at Hannibal's direction, in a place where it will be found when they want it to be found, while still giving the brother time to get to Chilton's place to close the wound. Since the Ripper has always worked alone, Will and Hannibal know it wouldn't immediately occur to Jack that this could change.

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